

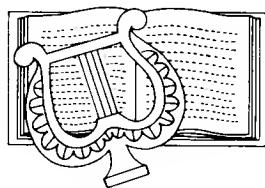
ROBERT THE ROVER

BY W. STEPHENS HAYWARD



AUTHOR OF "BLACK ANGEL" "FIERY CROSS" &c

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ROBERT THE ROVER;

OR,

Adventures on the Spanish Main.

ACROSS THE PAMPAS.



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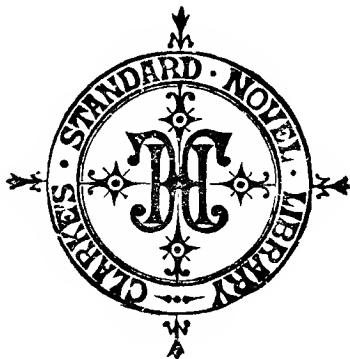
Adventures on the Spanish Main.

BY

W. STEPHENS HAYWARD,

AUTHOR OF

"THE BLACK ANGEL," "STAR OF THE SOUTH," "FIERY CROSS," ETC., ETC.



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ONE IN A THOUSAND, and
ROBERT THE ROVER.

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ROBERT THE ROVER.

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG LOVE'S DREAM.

MY baptismal name is Robert, and I was the second son—we had no sister—of Alfred Sabine, Esq., of Ailsa Lodge, New Forest, Hampshire, and Grosvenor Square, London, and, better still, he was the possessor of unmortgaged estates realising over six thousand a year; besides which he had thirty thousand pounds or thereabouts in the funds, avowedly intended as a provision for me, the landed estates being strictly entailed upon my brother Alfred.

A more prejudiced, unmitigable Bull-Briton than the Squire (my father) it is scarcely possible to conceive. He firmly believed that England was the only country in the world worth living in, Englishwomen the flowers, Englishmen the heroes of humanity, and English Tory's the only politicians worth mentioning.

Foreigners, especially French foreigners, he looked down upon with a lofty, compassionate dislike—not the less inveterate for being compassionate, pitiful. He was a staunch Protestant, not assuredly from any decided spiritual proclivity, but because—it at all events seemed so to me—it was the English religion.

As an illustrative example of this John-Bullism gone mad, I may mention that he refused to admit Prussians were Protestants, not on account of any differences in doctrine between the Lutheran and Anglican Churches—I doubt if he knew there were any—but because the Prussians had the shameless audacity to assert, and continue asserting, that they helped the English to win the battle of Waterloo, after it had been proved over and over again that they barely arrived in time to pursue the beaten, routed Frenchmen. There could be no sound religion, according to him, in a nation which promulgated such a bare-faced falsehood as that !

I mention this peculiarity in my father's character, who in all else was one of the most just and generous of men, forasmuch that but for that peculiarity I should not have been sent on my travels, and to a certainty South American wilds and forests would never have echoed the ring of my rifle, nor I have formed acquaintance, often much too intimate to be pleasant, with boa-constrictors, jaguars, crocodiles, and human (so-called) savages, more feroeious and formidable than they.

I must begin with the beginning, but my first nineteen years of joveund, robust life will not detain us very long.

My brother was sent to Eton, thence to Oxford. He was of a studious turn of mind, and one of the most affectionate, lovable of sons and brothers. But he was a frail, delicate youth. People say he took after our mother, who died when we were quite young. I, on the contrary, was remarkable for strength, activity of musele and limb, the duplicate in that respect of the Squire.

It was not so strange, therefore, that I should be the favourite son, though my father would have quarrelled with his best friend, if the best friend had ventured to

hint that his two sons were not equal sharers in his affection.

One proof of this involuntary partiality was, that he *would* have me educated at home under his own eye, by private tutors, of course. I got on very well at book-learning, but I had no overpowering bias towards scholarship. From an early age, my ambition, sedulously stimulated by my father, was to become a thoroughly-trained muscular Englishman, as hardy, keen, skilful as himself.

This purpose was fully achieved. At nineteen I was a first-rate shot, both with rifle and fowling-piece, a fearless fox-hunter, had ridden in two steeple-chases—winning one—swam like a duck, and could hit like a sledge-hammer—qualities which in the after-time stood me in excellent stead.

And hadn't I a ferociously healthy appetite! An incident which occurred at Dol, a village in Brittany, France, afforded a somewhat ludicrous proof of this, which I may here mention. I was staying at the *Pomme d'Or*, the principal, I rather think the only *auberge* or tavern in the place; the weather, though we were well on in September, was hot as July. I had been out shooting, and when I got back to the *Pomme d'Or*, felt intensely hungry. The small, close *salon à manger*, was hot as an oven, and as there was a refreshing breeze blowing, I determined to dine *al fresco* in the walled garden at the back of the house. By some singular accident, there was as I ascertained by inspection, some ten or a dozen pounds of really capital juicy beef-steak in the house.

I ordered beef-steaks, with et ceteras of course. The meat was admirably cooked, and the three-quarters of a pound, perhaps more, perhaps less (though I think not),

disappeared in a twinkling. Another—another! I felt the situation to be very enjoyable, the champagne and iced punch excellent, and was thinking of topping up with brandy-and-water and a cigar, when I was startled by screams of boyish laughter from a lot of youngsters who had clambered to the top of the wall to see an Englishman eat his fourth ‘bifstek’ dinner that afternoon. By Jove, didn’t I make the grinning *gamins* scamper off at the double quick! Four dinners, indeed! It was one dinner in four acts, so to speak, interluded by champagne and iced-punch.

The reader will not have failed to observe that this dinner anecdote is a parenthesis which I have jotted down, simply to show that my stomach was as hardy and inured to fatigue as any other of my bodily functions, a quality which also had its uses in the sweet time coming.

And to think such a young Samson should have been knocked over, brought on his knces by a slim Delilah, some months younger even than himself! I beg pardon, Emily Sinclair was not slim, nor do I for a moment intend to compare her, in a moral sense, with the ancient lady who sold Samson to the Philistines. Not at all. The young lady’s figure was rounded to fulness—not by any means too great fulness—of exquisite symmetry.

This was the manner of it—I mean the how and the why I was knocked over, brought to the damsels’s feet.

There was a widow of the name of Alford dwelling at about a mile’s distance from us, who, by an allowable lady-latitude of expression, gave herself out to be not far off five-and-thirty, a statement which students in physiology presumed to question; the eldest of her three gawky sons, looking to be at the very least four-and-twenty years of age.

Be that as it may, the widow had staying with her on a visit a very charming niece, the Emily Sinclair before spoken of, whom report had given out to be poor as she was pretty. Pretty was not the right word—far from it. Gazing at her was like looking in the face of an angel. A positive fact, young gentleman, and very possibly you yourself may know a damsel of whom the same thing might, in your opinion, be as truly said.

One of my mother's pious beliefs, of which she had a large stock, was that every child, every young person, had his or her guardian-angel, till I suppose they got married, when the custody, at all events in the case of the male sex, would of course be transferred to angels of a more mundane species. I well remember that when Alf and I were little boys she never failed, before bidding us good-night, to commend us to the watchful care of those spiritual special-constables.

I don't know whether such a belief is orthodox or not, but if so, my heavenly guardian sadly neglected his duty one summer afternoon, and one summer evening, too, in the beguiling, leafy month of June, when I was about midway between nineteen and twenty, that is, as Doctor Johnson expresses it, 'in the morning of life, when the blandishments of passion take the reason prisoner,' which I take to be the learned lexicographer's grandiose way of saying that when a young fellow happens to fall in love with a beautiful girl, he is very apt to make a pretty considerable fool of himself; of which profound verity I, in my own person, certainly presented a striking illustration.

My father received, one morning, a most gracious note from the widow, who, by the way, had not entirely given up the hope of one day becoming Mrs. Sabine. She was

a lady, I may observe, of a remarkably sanguine temperament, and if a man and a soldier, instead of a lady and mother, would have been admirably fitted to lead a forlorn hope. The note was an invitation to dinner at Forest House, on the next day but one, for Squire Sabine and Mr. Robert Sabine. Now my father hated dining out at all times, and, moreover, fought very shy of the comely widow.

He would not accept the invitation, but *I ought*, he said. I was quite willing, that careless guardian angel of mine never whispering a hint that to do so would plunge me into all sorts of perils, distresses, bedevilments, from which I should be fortunate, indeed, if I escaped with life.

That blessed widow placed me exactly opposite “dear Emily,” and I was at once done for. The delicious poison entered into my soul, though I was but confusedly aware of it before the ladies—there were some dozen of them, I think—rose from the table and retired to the drawing-room.

I was certainly conscious of feeling very queer, of thrilling sensations new in my boyish or young-mannish experience. The young lady’s soft, sweet, vibrating voice seemed to pulsate echo-like, in my brain, when she was not speaking; and the ineffable glances of her beautiful, bewildering eyes, the witchery of her smiles, played like lambent lightning about my heart.

Decidedly I was going, going—should be inevitably gone if I did not hurry away, as quickly as possible—and at an alarming sacrifice too. What the plague had suddenly come over me? Had not Alf and I vowed over and over again that we would never put ourselves ‘in circumscriptioп and confine’ till we were at least thirty years old? And now!

Tut, I would get home as soon as might be, sleep it off, and awake in the morning heart-whole—fancy-free. As I entered the drawing-room, the young lady was gazing out of the window at a superb sunset. A minute afterwards she turned round, saw, and motioned me to approach her.

"Is it not," she said, "one of the loveliest sights you ever beheld?" at the same moment slightly touching my arm.

That touch, slight as it was, deprived me of what little sense and self-possession I had left, and I blurted out, in a tone tremulous with emotion, and with, I felt, flaming eyes fixed on her face—

"It is, indeed, the loveliest sight that ever man beheld!"

A blush, smile, one of those ineffable glances revealing unfathomable depths, and the 'wilderling eyes were cast down, whilst the sweet, low voice, as in the murmur of a dream, said—

"I was speaking of the sunset."

What passed immediately upon that I did not clearly remember the next morning, but I was subsequently told I had been seized with a sudden faintness, and directly I recovered sufficiently, had hurried away, with brief leave-taking. I recollect the hurrying away, and arriving at Ailsa Lodge, rushing up to my chamber, shutting, locking the door, and throwing myself, dressed as I was, upon the bed. I passed a sleepless, wretched night.

"Mighty Cæsar! Robert," exclaimed my father, as I entered the breakfast-room, "what ails you? You look exceedingly ill!"

"I have been suffering from a severe headache all night," was my answer. "I shall be better presently."

"I hope so; and don't forget you are engaged to dine at Major Lambton's to-day. The Major was here last evening, and I excused myself, feeling, as I do, that a fit of gout was coming on. But you *must* go. I would not, on any account, offend the Major. A fine old English family," added my father, recurring to a favourite topic, "a branch, you know, of the Lambtons of Durham—dates from beyond the Conquest—from before Edward the Confessor. Thoroughly English, thoroughly Tory; no taint of foreign blood in *their* veins or Whig heresy in their hearts."

"Oh, the deuce take both the Conqueror and Confessor!" I exclaimed. "What do I care about them?"

I blurted out these ungracious words hastily, without thought. My father had more than once hinted that when the time came for me to marry, he should like the Major's only child, Miss Lambton, to be my wife. That idea, always repulsive to me, was now doubly so.

"Upon my word, Robert," said the Squire, gravely, "your mind, this morning, appears to be as disordered as your looks!"

"I beg pardon," said I. "I have not, as I told you, slept all night, and my temper is consequently irritable, waspish. It will pass off soon."

"You will not fail to dine at the Major's?"

"Oh, no; I'll not fail. He dines early, I know, and the company does not remain long afterwards. I will go since you wish it."

The day wore wearily on, and at four precisely I was at the Major's place. In the drawing-room with about twenty other persons were Mrs. Alford, her eldest son, and niece. Caught again! Miss Sinclair advanced towards me, extended her hand, and with an archness of smile and look which spoke unutterable things, asked if I

had quite recovered from the sudden attack of the previous evening.

I don't know what answer I made, or that I made any at all. The dinner-bell rang out just at the moment ; I offered my arm to Miss Lambton. I really knew not what I was doing ; and Miss Sinclair accepted that of a young and handsome Naval Lieutenant.

I sat next Miss Lambton, and not far from opposite the syren Sinclair, who, it struck my jealous fancy, was much too sweet upon the Naval Lieutenant. I retaliated by making almost open love to Miss Lambton. At least, I was afterwards told so. Be hanged, if I knew or recollect what I said or did, my real attention being absorbed by the Sinclair and her new admirer, a fact which no doubt the young lady perfectly appreciated.

The company broke up at about seven. Mrs. Alford and her son were not going home direct, and "dear Emily," who declined accompanying them in the call they intended to make, would have to trespass upon the kindness of some gentleman to see her through about a mile and a half of forest glade.

The Lieutenant eagerly proffered his services. "Thank you," said Miss Sinclair, with one of her sunniest smiles, and at the same moment darting at me one of her upsetting looks, "Thank you, sir, but I have promised to accept Mr. Sabine's escort."

What a confounded fib ! I was not, however, the less enchanted for that, and the more so that the handsome Lieutenant looked daggers at me. I almost forgot, should have entirely forgotten, had not the Sinclair reminded me of the unpardonable omission, to take formal leave of Miss Lambton and the Major.

That mile and a half walk through forest glade effec-

tually settled my business. Gracious, how well I remember it ! It was a delicious evening, the sun, setting in effulgent splendour, and clinging with a reluctant, parting embrace to the beautiful golden-flecked horizon, lit up the magnificent forest scenery with a subdued rose-tinted glory ; heaven and earth seemed to be basking in each other's smiles. And fallow deer would now and again spring suddenly across our path, causing the startled young lady hanging on my arm to cling closer to it.

In brief, how exactly it happened I know not, but certain it is that just at the entrance of Forest House grounds, the Sinclair was sitting on a rustic stile, and I on my knees at her feet, pouring forth a flood of incoherent rhapsody, but sufficiently intelligible, or I had not risen up Miss Sinclair's accepted lover, the sacredly pledged bridegroom of a young lady I had seen but twice, and of whom I knew nothing, except that she was very beautiful, an orphan, and I believed very poor. We parted at the door of Forest House, I undertaking that my father should see and confer with Mrs. Alford early the next day. As before stated, that precious walk effectually settled my business.

The return walk homeward was not so bright and pleasant. The sun had gone down, there was no moon, and the but faintly star-lit earth was growing cold and gloomy. It was a sobering hour, well fit for serious meditation.

There could be no imprudence in a money sense, in my early marriage with an undowered lady. There were thirty thousand pounds invested in consols, to which about three thousand would be yearly added, my father barely living up to half his income, all of which, with Ailsa

Lodge, would certainly be mine. Then, as he had lately told everybody, in strict confidence of course, my brother Alf had consented to cut off the entail in my favour to the extent of two thousand per annum. I was therefore not a bad catch, even for the divine Sinclair, in a pecuniary point of view.

True, but how would the governor take this hastily settled engagement of mine? That was the question ; of the favourable solution of which I, however, had very little doubt, spite of my father's known wish that I should marry the Major's daughter.

The lady of my heart was not a foreigner ; and as to her want of fortune, that I was sure he would care very little about. Indeed, I knew from my field-sport companion, Harry Roland, that my father had gravely rebuked Mr. Elsworthy, a wealthy, retired sugar-refiner, residing near Lymington, and my friend, Harry's uncle, for refusing to consent to the marriage of his son Reginald, a young man of large gifts and very sensitive temperament, with the daughter's governess, a lady about his own age, of gentle birth, remarkable beauty, and purest character, simply because she had no fortune. I should have little difficulty then to encounter in that respect ; and, moreover, come what may, I would not violate or trifle with my pledged faith. I lived, could only live in Emily Sinclair's life. Every other consideration would have to yield to that all dominating one.

The Squire was in the breakfast-room a few minutes before me. He appeared to be in remarkably high spirits.

"Bob," he exclaimed—I was always baptismally abbreviated wheu he was in especial good humour with me—"Bob, you sly villain, I've heard of your goings on last

evening, early as it is. I was rejoiced to hear it. We sadly want a lady head of the house, Bob ; you look two years older than you really are, and I don't see any reason why you should not marry at once."

I could hardly believe my ears! Who the deuce could have so quickly informed him of my engagement with Miss Sinclair? Had he received a communication from Mrs. Alford ! Quite possibly. I should soon know.

"My dear, dear father," I exclaimed, "you surprise as much as you delight me. I was just about to broach the subject."

"What is there, Bob, to be surprised at in your engagement, for my informant says she has no doubt it really went to that length, with an amiable, well-principled, good-looking young lady ? You will admit now, I suppose, that she is very good-looking ?"

"Very good-looking ! She has the face of an angel ; her figure is symmetry itself, exquisite symmetry !"

"Now, Bob, none of that stuff ; you are always in extremes. Her figure, I must admit, is *not* much to boast of——"

"Miss Sinclair's figure not much to boast about"——

I was stopped by a thunder clap. "Mighty Cæsar !" roared my father, "who the devil was talking of Miss Sinclair, as you call her ?"

"Why, weren't you ? Of whom else in heaven's, not the devil's, name ?"

"Of Miss Lambton, of course. Surely, Robert," the Squire added with stern emphasis, "you have not entangled yourself with that half-foreign, half-Franch jade. Her name is Saint Clair. Emilie Julie Saint Clair, not Sinclair as that wily widow pronounces the name : and she is a widow herself."

"Saint Clair!" I gasped in utter bewilderment, "and a widow, just turned of nineteen!"

"A widow, I tell you, though, as you say, but nineteen years of age. Her mother was a Frenchwoman, and she at seventeen married Captain St. Clair, a French cavalry officer, who was killed in a duel two or three months after the marriage. I should have thought her free manner—I do not say indecorously free, by no means, but still, not bashful, maiden-like manner"—added my father, in a softened tone, "would have caused you to suspect that she must be a widow, spite of the freshness and charm of youth and beauty which it cannot be denied she possesses."

I was stunned, dumb-founded. I tried to speak, but the words would not come.

"Perfectly understand, Robert Sabine," my father continued with grave earnestness, "that if you have been inveigled into an engagement with that person, the marriage must not, cannot, *shall* not take place. The young lady herself, or I am much mistaken, will be the first to repudiate the engagement when she hears from me through her scheming aunt, that in marrying you, she will wed a beggar. That that would be the case, be quite assured; it will be my fixed, inflexible resolve that it shall."

I heard no more. A thousand lights were dancing before my eyes, a confused rumour of tongues, so to speak was buzzing in my brain. I fainted, slipped from the chair prone on the carpet, and was carried in a state of utter unconsciousness to bed. Two or three hours afterwards, I was in a raging fever of the typhoid type.

For many days my life was in imminent danger; at length the natural vigour of my constitution slowly triumphed, but I was reduced to a skeleton. My father,

too, when I recognised him, seemed greatly changed
His anxiety had been intense, overwhelming.

Not till the physician decided that the probable excitement it would give rise to would not be dangerous, did he venture to speak upon the subject nearest our hearts, and then his manner was kind, affectionate, gentle as a mother.

"Robert," he said, seating himself by the side of a couch upon which I was reclining, "I have received disquieting intelligence about Alfred. He has been very ill, and is coming home. Do not distress yourself about that, dear boy. There is no absolute danger at *present* the doctors say, and change of air may greatly benefit him. I at one time feared," added the Squire, in a broken, husky voice, "I was about to lose both my sons."

He paused, and a few minutes having passed, resumed evidently with painful effort :

"And now, Robert, I must speak to you with reference to the young lady, Mrs. Sinclair—I prefer her Anglicised name."

"Is Miss Sinclair," I eagerly asked, "still at Forest House?"

"Oh, yes. And there is no danger of her leaving it," added my father with a sad smile, "so long as her engagement with Robert Sabine has a chance of being carried out. Believe me, Robert, I do not really think the worse of an unportioned young woman for seeking to scale, with the help of personal advantages, the heights of society, and secure for herself riches and position. It is perfectly natural and quite justifiable that she should do so. I have seen and conversed with Mrs. Sinclair many times," added my father, "and I fully admit that she is not only

a singularly fascinating but very sensible person. Still, you know my deep-seated, inveterate prejudice against foreigners. It is wrong, I dare say, stupid to indulge such feelings, but I cannot help it."

"Miss or Mrs. Sinclair is *not* a foreigner," I murmured.

"No, not technically. Her father, Mrs. Alford's brother, was an Englishman, and she was born in Lancashire. But we have come to an arrangement—a compromise respecting you?"

"An arrangement, a compromise, respecting, and without consulting me?"

"As to that, Robert," said my father, with a pleasant smile, "the charming young widow has undertaken that you shall consent, if you refuse to do so at my request. The arrangement or compromise is this. Young Elsworthy, the retired sugar-refiner's son is getting into a bad way about a certain governess: this romance of love by the way puts unromantic father's terribly out. Mr. Elsworthy will *not* consent to the marriage, he has an adamantine will of his own which I have not. He is about to send him to Rio Janeiro, Brazil, where Mr. Elsworthy's eldest married son has a large establishment, in the hope that the sea voyage, the entire change of scene, life, manners, may not only benefit Reginald's health, but drive those love-whimsies out of his brain. Your friend, Harry Roland, sails with him, and your beautiful *fiancée* has agreed that you shall go too."

"I—banish myself to Rio Janeiro, Brazil, the Spanish Main, South America, the devil knows where? Not I indeed—catch me at it."

"Yes, yes, you will. The fascinating young widow, as I told you, has undertaken that you will."

"For how long, in the fiend's name?"

"Till you are of age, and you want nearly eighteen months to that. If at the end of that time your mind has not changed, I shall freely consent to the marriage, and I have further signed and sealed an agreement—yours, as I have said, is a very sensible lady-love—to allow her five hundred a year from this time, and continue to do so, to the end of her life, should any accident befall you, or you change your mind as to the marriage."

"I'll not be put up to auction, bargained for in that way," I angrily exclaimed. "Not I—don't think it. I will not go, that's poz."

"Mrs. Sinclair is with her aunt, in the drawing-room," said my father, with one of his old arch smiles. "Will you see her?"

"Good heaven! yes, certainly. Stop, my dear father. Send Williams to me. I must change this dress, and otherwise trim myself up. I am not fit to be seen."

"I will send Williams to you," said the Squire, as he left the room laughing. It was pleasant to see any sign of a return to his former hilarious tone of thought, but as for banishing myself to the woods and wilds of Brazil—the cities I felt sure I could not exist in—the idea was preposterous. Never!

I suppose an hour, two for what I know, had passed (I kept no account of the golden moments), when my father re-appeared.

"Well, Robert, how is it to be?"

"How long will it be before we sail?" said I, reddening to the colour of a peony. "This young lady could not inform me."

"In about ten days. I have ordered dinner for two," added my father, "to be served in this room. That arrangement, I presume, will not be objected to?"

"Son of man," thought I, "boast not thyself, especially when a lady's in the case ! But there, Adam, in the days of innocence, could not help himself, and how could I expect to do better than he ?" And thus it came about that I, Robert Sabine, turned a rover on the face of the earth, and fell to adventurising on the Spanish Main,

CHAPTER II.

MY NATIVE LAND, GOOD NIGHT.

THE good ship, *Dolphin*, sailed punctually on the day fixed, for Rio Janeiro.

The distracting young widow, my father, brother had taken tender, sorrowing leave of my half-demented self on the previous day, Emilie Julie St. Clair, being, I could not help thinking, much the least affected of the four. In fact, I never saw her looking better. She was charmingly dressed ; her beautiful eyes were never more divinely lustrous, her smile more enchanting. I remarked upon this in a whisper.

"I am glad, Robert, you think so," she replied in the same tone. "It is well, as an antidote to infidelity on your part, that the last impression of me should be a favourable one. And here is another aid to constancy," she added, placing in my hand a beautifully executed miniature of herself. "You will remember the song I have taught you—

'Portrait charmant, portrait de mon amie,
Gage d'amour, d'un amour obtenu,'"

she added in soft silvery tones, "when you sometimes look upon it. Adieu, once more!"

The voyage out was a very pleasant one, till we were within some hundred sea leagues of our destination. A tragic catastrophe then occurred, for which, however, I and Harry Roland, as I take the liberty of calling him,

and one of the best fellows in the world, were not altogether unprepared.

Reginald Elsworthy had taken his love disappointment fatally to heart. He was, I have before stated I think, a young man of large gifts, of vivid imagination, and exceedingly sensitive temperament. I could not help at times thinking that his intellect—I mean his power of controlling it—was giving way.

Sometimes, whilst leaning listlessly over the ship's side, peering into the clear glassy water, his eyes would brighten and flash, and a smile of unutterable joy illumine his pale, pensive face, as if he discerned in the ocean depths the image of the loved and lost one.

Once and once only, when I was close by him, but unobserved, he was seized with a fit of hallucinative vertigo, as I deemed it to be. "Charlotte, beloved Charlotte!" he exclaimed, in tones tremulous with ecstasy, and seemed about to leap into the sea. I touched his shoulder, he turned round, shuddered, and silently accepted my proffered arm. We paced the deck to and fro, I talking upon indifferent subjects, that he might not think I had observed anything unusual in his conduct. After a while he had quite regained his usual languid composure, and sat down sad and silent in his accustomed place.

I spoke to the surgeon of the ship, a kind, intelligent gentleman, about him. He looked grave, and presently said, "I am not at all surprised at what you tell me. You must look well after your friend; his mind is morbidly excited, his remarkably sensitive organization is becoming deranged, and very soon I fear the imaginative faculty, fed and inflamed by constantly brooding over one subject, will completely dominate and supersede his

natural perceptions. It is an uncommon, but well understood, form of mental disease. I myself once knew a somewhat similar case."

"A boy," continued the Surgeon, "about fourteen years of age, had been compelled, for some reason or other, to apprentice himself to the owner and captain of a merchant ship. He detested the sailor's occupation, and soon fell into a state of melancholy from which nothing, neither punishment nor promises, could rouse him. Like your friend, he was constantly gazing into the sea when it was calm, mirror-like, and persisted that he often saw therein his native village in Somersetshire, the cottage in which he was born, and his mother and sister in the garden. Nothing could disabuse him of the illusion, and one calm summer evening when the sea was smooth as glass, he sprang with outstretched arms over the ship's side, wildly exclaiming, 'Mother! Susan!' sank like a lump of lead and was seen no more. You must, I repeat, look heedfully to your friend. I will do my part as to medicine, if he will take it, and it may be that his mental faculties will recover their tone."

Three or four days passed away, there was a very slight breeze, but the sea was calm as a fishpond. I was discussing a bottle of port and some prime old Havannas with Roland, when cries of "man overboard!" rang through the ship. Reginald Elsworthy, with one convulsive shout of "Charlotte! Charlotte! I come—I come!" had sprung over the side and was seen drifting, already some distance from the ship. A boat was promptly lowered, and pulled swiftly towards him. Too late! Sharks—the fins of two were distinctly seen from the deck—were quicker. There was a loud cry of agony, the sea was stained with blood when the boat reached

the spot where the unfortunate young man had disappeared, and all was over.

The suddenness and terrible nature of the catastrophe which had befallen poor Reginald, it will be readily believed, gave both Harry and myself a tremendous shock. It was some minutes before I, at all events, could bring myself to realise its truth. It seemed to sweep across my brain like a dream-image of indistinct and shadowy horror.'

The Surgeon, whose nerves, naturally, it may be presumed, as sensitive, impressionable as our own, had been in a great degree steeled by professional experience to death-incidents, said in a calm though sad voice—

"Come below with me, young gentlemen, and take a glass of wine or two. I shall not be the worse if I follow my own prescription. The catastrophe that has just occurred," said the Surgeon, after we had implicitly complied with his advice—and the old Havannas—though I almost detested myself for so soon yielding to such sensuous influences—were beginning to draw delightfully again, "the catastrophe we have just witnessed is no doubt very startling to the imagination, but in plain, sober truth, there are many gates of death, the passage through which is far more terrible. A sharp flash of agony like the lightning which ceases to be ere one can say it lightens," continued the Surgeon; "and life with all its sorrows, griefs, pains, is past!"

"And with all its joys, endearments, its prismatic hopes, its fairy romance, glowing aspirations," said I.

"True," said the Surgeon, "but prismatic, Iris-tinted hopes, fairy romance, flowing aspiration, ever fade out with youth; and that's a stuff which *can't* endure. But I have no inclination to moralise on the fearful spectacle

which just now passed before our eyes; I mean only that, as devouring earth, like the sea, is full of untimely graves, it is wise not to allow our minds to dwell in a morbid sense, upon such saddening mementoes of mortality. Especially you," added Dr. Kirwan, "who, if I may take seriously the half-confidences with which you have favoured me, are about to brave death in some of his most appalling forms in the South American wilderness, ought to familiarise your minds with the King of Terrors, as he is sometimes called. For be quite sure of this, young men, that you must look the said monarch, in whatsoever form he presents himself, calmly in the face, if you would escape his fatal clutch."

"I do not think, Doctor," said I, with some heat, "that you should by implication charge us with faintness of heart, deficiency of manly resolution, because the terrible fate of poor Reginald Elsworthy blanched our cheeks, and shook us with horror!"

"Nothing could be further from my thoughts, Mr. Sabine, than to insinuate anything of the kind. My opinion of you both would lead to a very opposite conclusion; but I *do* say, and have been several times upon the point of saying it, that if you really mean to hunt the wildernesses of Brazil, and contiguous territory, you—especially just now—will do so with your lives in your hands."

"Perhaps so, and the same may be said of a steeple-chase in Hampshire, or an attempt to scale Mont Blanc. There can be no excitement, no electric thrill of exultant delight pulsating along one's veins, except danger has been boldly confronted—overcome."

"And did not Alexander von Humboldt, and lots of other fellows—old fogeys, too, some of them," said Roland, "traverse these terrible wildernesses with impunity?"

"Humboldt and other scientific explorers," said the Surgeon, "followed beaten tracks, and always in sufficient numbers to reduce the peril to a minimum. But I do most earnestly council you, especially under the actual circumstances in which the countries you are about to visit are placed, to be very circumspect and cautious in your forest explorations."

"To what extraordinary circumstances do you allude?" I asked.

"To the war now raging between Francisco Lopez, Dictator of Paraguay, on one side, and the Brazilian Empire and the Argentine Republic on the other. The country is in a flame throughout a great portion of its immense extent, and filled with plundering, murdering desperadoes, who are soldiers only in name."

"Oh, the deuce take the dictators, emperors, presidents! What shall we have to do with them or their wars?"

"You may wish to have nothing to do with them or their wars, but whether they will have nothing to do or say with you is quite another matter. But I have not mooted this topic for the purpose of sermonising; if wilful will to water, wilful must drench. But it has occurred to me to tell you of an adventure I had about two years ago—not to be repeated if I know it. It is of the kind you appear to be in search of, and which, if your minds hold—and I don't doubt they will—you will without question have in great variety to entertain your friends at home and the girls you left behind you with, should you be so exceptionally fortunate as ever to see home and girls again. It has, I say, occurred to me that the little adventure which befel me on the Amazon may be of service to you, by way of warning, and as affording a slight glimpse of the biped, quadruped, serpent-society

with which you are bent, it seems, upon being intimately acquainted. Philosophy, it is said, always teaches most effectually by examples. Do you wish to hear the story?"

"Of course, we do. You have given us 'bogus' enough already, it is true ; but, still let us hear your little adventure. It may help at all events to divert our thoughts from the shark-sepulchre in which poor Reginald has been swallowed up. But the decanters have run out. Harry, my boy, replenish. Old port, first-rate Havannas, and a hair-stand-on-end story are potent specifics, depend upon it, for clearing one's brain of fog and driving away the blue devils. Now then, Doctor, begin."

CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR'S ADVENTURE ON THE AMAZON.

"A 'HAIR-STAND-ON-END,' or sensational story, my young friends," began the Surgeon, "is no doubt pleasant enough to read or hear told, but, speaking from my own experience—slight, it is true, but more than sufficient for a man who has very little taste that way—is an altogether different, in fact, a most infernal thing to be an actor in ; one of the *dramatis personæ*, whose 'sensations' at the time given excite in the reader or hearer an agreeable emotional sympathy, especially when, as you say, the narrative is supplemented by other and carnal stimulants.

"This brief romantic episode in my life," continued the Surgeon, "I am not sure, by the way, that romantic is the right word ; but I do know, and bless my stars for it that it was tolerably 'brief,'—reckoned by days and months—began and ended in a very common-place humdrum sort of way.

"I was residing at Rio, and for some time had been 'unattached,' that is, I had no professional engagement on shore or on board ship. We all know that a certain personage, who in my opinion is quite as black as he's painted, whatever some soft-hearted folk may say to the contrary, will always find some mischief still for idle hands to do. He certainly did not neglect *me*.

"I had sauntered into a billiard-saloon in the Cidade Nova, or New Town of the Brazilian capital, not to play,

for I never handled a cue in my life, but to take shelter from the tremendous heat, and lazily look on, whilst sipping my coffee, at the players. It was as now towards the end of October, and summer, which begins at about the close of September, had set in with a vengeance. The air seemed to pulsate with fervent heat; and even the players—passionately addicted as all Brazilians are to the game—dropped their cues, and adjourned to the capacious cool covert of a grove at the back of the hotel, overarched by the brilliant foliage and flowers of climbing, interlacing orchidæ, forming a floral pendant canopy, supported by, and, as it seemed, springing from, a wide circle of palm trees. Several fountains of water were constantly playing, and the temperature was endurable.

"I had followed the rest of the company, several of whom I personally knew. One amongst them rather intimately. The name of this worthy was Romero—Señor José Romero.

"The speciality of Señor Romero was speculation. He had always half-a-dozen schemes on hand—or rather in his brain—the inventive properties of which were inexhaustible. By some fatality, however, his devices for realising immense fortunes in just no time had, from some unlucky circumstance or other which ought never to have occurred, always fallen through.

"For several months past he had his eye upon me—no, not so much upon me, El Inglese, personally, as upon about fifteen hundred pounds sterling which he knew lay payable to my order in the Imperial Bank of Rio Janeiro. Of this, in Romero's estimation, enormous sum, about one moiety only really belonged to me. The rest was trust-money confided to me under circumstances which I need not go into.

"Romero soon got into conversation with me, and we

were presently in the thick of a scheme, which really seemed to present strong elements of success. It was a project for establishing a company to breed Brazilian beef, for the European, and especially the English market.

"An infallible specific for ensuring it to arrive at the London market in as fresh a state as it had been shipped in the Bahia de Rio Janeiro, or other South American outlet, had been discovered by a learned professor. Nothing but a start was required to float the scheme, and the fortunes of some dozen of us would be made."

"Dr. Kirwan," said I, as the Surgeon paused to refresh, "you surely ain't going to drummle us to sleep with a joint-stock company swindling story? We have been sickened enough at home with that sort of bosh!"

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Sabine; but it is surely necessary to tell you *how* I came to be mixed up with swindlers, schemers, Caribs, slaves, jaguars, boas, Jesuit padres, devilrics in short, and almost without number.

"I will, however, briefly skip the preliminaries. Enough, that the Company was formed. Romero, Chairman and chief Director, and my asinine self, Secretary, with a salary of one thousand pounds per annum! You may well laugh.

"Never mind—especially since it's of no use to mind. The first thing to be done, the Company being 'started' upon paper, was to start ourselves on horseback to visit various haciendas—establishments where enormous numbers of beasts are slaughtered, chiefly for their hides, and the tallow they yield.

"As these lay hundreds of miles apart, we rode, I, Romero, and Señor Cazias, a sub-director and his particular friend, for six or seven weeks—now in one direction, now in another, through the interminable forests—

visited numerous haciendas—and made elaborate calculations as to the cost prime, transport of the animals, &c.

“I had got desperately weary of that eternal round-abouting game, of which nothing seemed likely to come ; and at last plumply told Romero I would be fooled no further. I should return to Rio forthwith, but must first insist upon his handing over to me the balance remaining in his hands of the five hundred pounds I had advanced.

“A fierce quarrel ensued ; to words succeeded blows, and I was felled to the ground with the heavily loaded butt-end of Cazias’ heavy riding-whip. The villain had come behind me, whilst I was struggling with Romero. I remembered nothing more till several hours had passed, and the full moon had arisen, though it was not near sun-down when we halted to bivouac for the night.

“Consciousness slowly returned. I found myself being gently, kindly ministered to by a Carib girl—comely for a Carib girl—about sixteen or seventeen years of age. She was attired in civilised fashion, and spoke the Portuguese language much better than I did.

“She had been out birding, along the banks of the river, as she assured me it was, though its apparently illimitable extent would have induced me to believe I was looking on the Atlantic. It was the mighty Amazon.

“The girl, whose name she told me was Felice Maria, had a bamboo blow-pipe, and lying on the ground beside it was a quiver nearly full of the slight arrows, the points of which, dipped in curare poison, are used principally to shoot birds. Felice was taking home several flamingoes she had killed.

“It was fortunate, Felice said, she had passed that way as jaguars, numerous about there, would no doubt have soon discovered, and of course eaten me. She had

also, fortunately, brandy with her, and that had revived me.

"At her urgent instance, and helped by her, I got upon my feet, and surrendered myself to her guidance.

"'Where am I,' asked I, 'and whither are you leading me?'

"'You are not far from the Padre Zenos' Mission-Station on the Amazon. You will be kindly received,' added the girl; 'the Padre is a good man. I am,' she added timidly, 'a Christian girl, one of the Padre Zenos' pupils; I have lived with him at the Mission almost as long as I can remember.'

"I made no reply. In fact I seemed to be walking, tottering, staggering as in a dream.

"'Two Europeans,' presently continued the girl, 'arrived at the Mission a few hours ago.'

"'Two Europeans!' I exclaimed; 'can you mean the two villains who left me for dead—must have believed they had murdered me?'

"'Oh, no,' said the girl; 'a lady and gentleman, two unfortunates like yourself. Ah! here we are in sight of the Mission-House. The Padre,' she added, 'has retired to his sanctum for the night. You can see the light of his cigar, Señor, up there, through the topmost branches.'

"'Sanctum!' said I aloud, but speaking in English as my eye followed the direction of hers. 'This is really a very remarkable young Carib.'

"'Ah, you are English!' exclaimed Felice Maria. 'I thought so; I understand that language pretty well, but cannot speak it. And the two unfortunates I spoke of, the Captain and his daughter, are English, too.'

"'Oh! there's a young lady in the case!' exclaimed Harry Roland, "that affords a chance, that your story,

Doctor, will be soon getting livelier. But what the deuce did the Carib girl mean by a sanctum up amongst the top branches of trees?"

"The sanctum of Padre Zenos," said the Surgeon, "was a contrivance of the worthy man's to escape the mosquito plague. Those venomous insects, especially near the swampy banks of rivers, make a European's life, at all events till he has become thoroughly acclimatised, one incessant torment. Now, Father Zenos, an observant man, noticing that the devilish things swarm only in the lower strata of air, rarely soaring higher than forty or fifty feet at most, hit, soon after he arrived in the country, some twenty years since—and his example has found many imitators—upon the idea of constructing a wooden frame-work, *sanctum*, he calls it, supported upon the top branches of tall trees, clustered near each other. Access thereto is obtained by bark-rope ladders; and there the reverend gentleman smoked his cigar and sipped his curaçoa in peace, seldom descending to earth, except when his spiritual functions or other business compelled him to do so. A very jolly old cock," added the Surgeon, "is Zenos, Jesuit though he be, as I have no doubt you will agree with me that he is, after but a slight acquaintance with his reverence."

"It is not very likely," said I, "that we shall ever make his reverend acquaintance. We have certainly no present purpose of bivouacking upon the mosquito swarming swamps of the Amazon."

"I daresay not, and yet, in my opinion, it's on the cards that you will, and before long, too. If it had not suddenly occurred to me that you would be very likely to do so, I might not have volunteered to bore you with this nervous little adventure of mine."

"Miss Ellen Marston, a singularly attractive, highly enthusiastic young lady, and most devoted of daughters, is, I have no doubt, still at Rio. She and Madam Elsworthy, the wife of your unfortunate friend's elder brother, are the most intimate of friends, quite sisters in affection!"

"And who the mischief," said I, "is Miss Ellen Marston? and what is that attractive and enthusiastic, devoted daughter to us, or likely to be? I, of course, can't answer for Harry," I added, "but as to myself, having past the fiery ordeal, I am henceforth proof against woman-witcheries. *Portrait charmant*," I added, in sighing *sotto voce*, as I drew forth, and spoonily contemplated the miniature! "*Portrait charmant*."

Was there ever such a sentimental young idiot? No wonder Harry and the Doctor burst into a hoarse laugh, and that I savagely reddened to the roots of my hair. I must have been downright maudlin—overcome no doubt by the terrible fate of poor Reginald, the excellency of the wine, and enervating insidiousness of the best Havannas I had ever smoked—a trio, these, of potent influences too much for youthful humanity, slowly recovering from enfeebling fever, to hold its own against! Don't you think so?

"Never mind, Sabine," roared Harry Roland, "he's booked, but I am open to an engagement. But just skip for the present, the devoted, and deuce knows what else, daughter. We shall meet some day, in Rio, perhaps, but get on with the story, there's a dear Doctor. We left you and the Carib girl, staring up at the reverend Padre's sanctum half an hour ago. Go ahead."

"The reverend gentleman saw me," continued the Surgeon, "before I possibly could him, and at once came

down—a process of some difficulty to a younger, more active man—to receive and welcome me. Those missionary stations, on the South American rivers, are veritable oases in the wilderness. Whether they are very effective in the furtherance of their ostensible mission—that of converting the heathen—I cannot say, but unquestionably they are sanctuaries of refuge to many a hunted wretch, protected as they are, not only by the Brazilian and other governments, but by a sort of superstitious awe attaching to them in the minds of the most brutish of the native savages. The priests, too, all Jesuits, I believe, are tolerably skilled in pharmacy, and by that means acquire great influence.

"The reverend Padre welcomed me very kindly, and we soon reached his hospitable home, a very comfortable dwelling, abundantly supplied with creature comforts.

"Father Zenos, before he would permit me to tell my story, insisted upon my taking refreshment, including some really capital wine, sent him by friends at Oporto, he told me.

"He was polite enough to say he had always admired and esteemed the great English nation, and especially did so now, when, as all the world knew, they were about to re-enter the fold of Saint Peter *en masse*.

"I did not think it worth while to disturb the good man's illusion upon that subject, and presently related the chief incidents of the misadventure which had befallen me.

"Padre Zenos smoked on in meditative silence for several minutes after I had done.

"'They have robbed you, no doubt,' he presently said.

"'I don't know,' said I, in a fresh panic, 'I had not

thought of that! The villains!' I exclaimed, after searching all my pockets. 'They have taken everything—money, pocket-book, papers—all—all is gone.'

"'I was sure of that: *Sancta Maria*, it would be strange indeed if assassins did not seize the booty for the sake of which they did the murder. You had your bank-vouchers with you, and they knew it.'

"'Quite true. They will make a clean sweep of all the money standing in my name at the Imperial Bank!'

"'That, since you are still living, is not so certain. *Madre de dios*—how was it they did not make sure you were dead? It is that which puzzles me! Were you rendered immediately insensible by the ruffian's blow, so that you heard nothing whatever of what subsequently must have passed between—been uttered by the confederates?'

"'Now you suggest it, reverend sir, I do seem to have a confused remembrance of Cazias wanting to do something, which Romero would not consent to. Yet, I know not—I have no *distinct* recollection of anything whatever that occurred after I was felled to the ground.'

"'Something of the kind must have taken place, depend upon it,' said the Padre. 'Romero, you say, occupies a good position, of a certain kind, in Rio. *He* may not have intended to murder you; but it may be feared that upon reflection he, as well as his fellow-ruffian, will clearly understand that there can be no safety for them, as long as you live to tell the tale. Rely upon it, they are not far off. We must be wary. To-morrow we will take close counsel together. At present—'

"Father Zenos was interrupted by the entrance of Felice. She spoke to him in a tongue I did not under-

stand, Caribese, probably, and evidently with reference to me. I quickly knew what about.

“‘You are a surgeon, Señor Inglese,’ said the padre, turning towards me, ‘and, I am sure, will not refuse your aid to relieve the sufferings of a countryman of yours who with his daughter has sought refuge here.’

“Of course, I said nothing would give me greater pleasure than to afford what assistance I could.

“‘I was certain of that,’ said the Padre. ‘The gentleman’s name is Marston—Captain Marston—who——’”

“Captain Marston!” interrupted Roland; “the transcendently devoted daughter’s father!”

“Yes. ‘Tell Señor Marston,’ said the Padre to Felice, ‘that this gentleman will attend upon the Captain the moment he is ready to receive him. I have,’ continued the Padre, as Felice vanished with her message, ‘I have an excellent case of English surgical instruments, but am little skilled in their use.’

“‘Is there a surgical operation to be performed?’ I asked in some surprise.

“‘I think so,’ replied Father Zenos. ‘The Captain had his right leg broken a few days since by a rifle bullet, and the bone has, I think, been badly set.’

“‘Captain Marston is, then, in active service?’ I remarked.

“‘Perhaps he is, perhaps not; I cannot say—have not inquired. I only know that he is a hunted fugitive, and has sought shelter here. I am, however, aware that when a young man he was in the military service of Dr. Francia, the first Dietator of Paraguay, a strip of territory between the Parana and Paraguay rivers, which the third Dictator, Lopez II., is now ambitious to greatly enlarge by the conquest of the La Plata States. Whether it is the soldiers of Lopez who are hunting down the Captain

or not, I cannot say. I should suppose not, at this distance from the Paraguayan territory ; but Lopez has long arms, and is staunch upon the track of a foe as a sleuth-hound. Ah, here is Felice.'

"Felice came to say Captain Marston was ready and anxious to see me. I desired the Padre to show me his surgical instruments, found they were in excellent order, that everything that might be required was ready to hand, and we at once proceeded to the invalid's chamber.

"The room was illumined by one feeble solitary lamp, and from the gloom stood out as it were in striking lineament and expression the graceful, statuesque figure and face of the daughter, Ellen Marston. She was standing by the head of the couch upon which her father lay, and bowed as we entered the chamber with grave courtesy.

"I have seldom, if ever, seen a more striking personage than Ellen Marston. Yes, personage is the right word. Above the medium height, of splendid form, classically chiselled features, large, dark eyes, electric with the flame light, if I may so express myself, of a fiery soul——"

"Draw it mild, Doctor," interjected Roland. "Don't try to set us on fire before our time. Me, I mean ; for Bob Sabine—— Oh, indeed ! Don't you 'Harry' me, then ! —I was saying, Doctor," continued he, tossing off another bumper, "I was asking you, Doctor, not to set me on fire before my time. As to Bob Sabine,—he, you know, was 'cinderalled' months ago. Not bad that, eh ? Eheu ! Poor Reginald ! What a couple of unfeeling, heartless rascals we both are, to be sure ! Go on, Doctor !"

"It strikes me," said the Surgeon, "I had better leave off, though the best, the pith of the story is yet to come."

"By Jove, I should think so !" shouted Harry, who was getting wildish ; "that is, if there is any pith in it

at all. Go on, Doctor, don't mind me. The flame-light, you were saying, of a thunder-and-lightning soul!"

"Nonsense! If you are not disposed to listen seriously," said the Surgeon—"for, understand, I am speaking with a purpose—tell me so. Very well, I will go on, then, and be brief as possible.

"I will merely add with respect to Miss Marston's personal attributes, that though there was not the slightest taint or cross in the blood flowing in her veins —her mother was the daughter of English parents, but born at Buenos Ayres, Captain Marston had left England for America when a mere boy—the warm kisses of the sunny south had kindled a brighter glow of complexion, given a deeper hue to her glossy raven hair, than one usually sees in the beauteous daughters of the cold, pale north. In a word, the impression made upon me was that she was a woman born to command, subdue rather than melt or enthrall by sympathetic tenderness."

"Give me the melting dears," again interrupted that incorrigible Harry, "the bewitching *little* darlings. Anybody may have the grandissimo Roxalanes and Satiras for me. Beg pardon, Doctor. Go on, please."

"Captain Marston's," said the Surgeon, "was a fine-featured expressive face, on which the soldier impress was visibly stamped to least discerning eyes. I examined the hurt. It was fortunately a simple fracture only, of the right leg bone; and must have been set by a hurried bungler. I felt his pulse, there would be no danger; and I instantly re broke, that is, unset the bone. An involuntary cry of pain escaped the sufferer, and Miss Marston flashed lightning at me. 'What are you doing with my father, sir?' she exclaimed. 'Restoring him, I hope, the use of his broken limb, young lady,' I replied.

I explained—pressed a little brandy upon the Captain—the bone was properly set, secured, and all was so far well.

“‘Will Captain Marston be long confined to his couch?’ asked the daughter. ‘We are in great peril here, sir,’ she added, ‘and every hour deepens that peril.’

“‘Captain Marston,’ interposed Father Zenos, ‘cannot possibly leave till the return of the United States schooner, which passed on a trading speculation up-river nearly a fortnight ago. I expect her to touch here in a very few days. There is no doubt that every one of you will obtain a passage in her.’

“‘There need be no danger incurred,’ said I, ‘in conveying Captain Marston on board, were the vessel to arrive to-morrow.’

“‘Thank God—thank God!’ exclaimed the lady, with much emotion, ‘we may then yet escape the blood-hounds!’

“No remark was made upon this. Father Zenos and I left the room, and I was soon afterwards in bed.

“I rose rather late the next day, but entirely free from pain. The blow dealt me by Señor Cazias had stunned me, nothing or but little more than that, thanks in some degree, perhaps, to the thickness of my occiput.

“Not only matins had been long since said or sung in the chapel, but breakfast was over for the establishment, which consisted of from fifteen to twenty individuals, Caribs, Indians of other varieties, and negroes, who were employed in the cultivation of the mission farm.

“Captain Marston, Felice informed me, as she deftly spread out a dainty breakfast, had passed a quiet night, and felt much better, easier.

“‘I am going out birding presently,’ added Felice; ‘will you go with me? It is a fine morning, and a walk, Señor, will do you good.’

"I gladly assented, and Felice left the room, saying she would return for me in about half-an-hour. The Padre, I found, had already ascended to his sanctum, and left word that he should expect me to dine with him up there.

"Felice returned within the half hour, fully equipped in a plain forest dress, a bamboo blow-pipe, and slung quiver full of poisoned arrows. The curare poison in which the sharpened end of arrows are dipped, is distilled, the girl told me, by a peculiar process, from the brown snake of the South American forests, a deadly variety of the serpent species. Really, the young Carib was almost good-looking; the intelligent, good-tempered expression of her face making you almost forget its—to European taste—repulsive Carib features.

"The morning was indeed a splendid one; the giant forest, the ocean river, were flashing in all the glory of a southern summer. It was a morning decked with a floral, sea-silvery splendour, to entrance, delight, as well as astonish an unaccustomed stranger, but for the swarms of infernal mosquitoes, who seemed to be endowed with more than usual venomous vitality by the brilliant sunshine.

"Felice had, however, provided me with a green veil as well as gloves; and though, spite of that precaution, I did not escape the attacks of the insidious, indomitable insects, I was able to stand the infliction pretty well.

"I will not attempt to describe to you," continued the Surgeon, after freshening his nip, "the gorgeous tangled foliage of a South American forest, except to notice a peculiarity which struck me most of all. On the summit, we will say, of a huge mimosa tree, there would grow a bamboo, a palm, or a fig tree, another of a different kind

upon that, all drawing sustenance from the roots of the mimosa giant—and all encircled, twined about, interlaced by many-coloured creeping, pendant orchidæ, until at last, Felice informed me, the mimosa, deprived by the process of its sustenance and strength, gives way, and with it down topples the superincumbent parasites, scattering around in their fall the seeds of renewed vegetation.

"The margin of the river," went on the Surgeon, full swing, "was alive with tortugas, land-turtles with web feet; spoon-bills, water-hens, and a slight sprinkling of young crocodiles. Many of the tortugas had been turned on their backs and their flesh devoured by jaguars—so at least Felice said, but I did not see the process going on."

"I fancy," said Harry Roland, who rather piqued himself on his connoisseurship of animated nature in most of its varieties, "I fancy that is a little invention of Miss Christian Carib. Turtles, I have always understood, have but two enemies to fear—man, who takes him home and cooks him; and the boa constrictor, who swallows him whole, and digests, consumes him, as the Court of Chancery does a large estate, slowly in the interior."

"I have no doubt for all that," said the Surgeon, "that Miss Christian Carib, as you call her, was right. A singularly clever shot, with her poison-tipped arrows, she certainly was. Flamingoes, a favourite dainty, often perch in columnar clusters upon the tops of trees. This was the case on that morning.

"Felice, stealing quietly under the tree, placed an arrow in the bamboo tube, lifted it to her lips, blew, and away flew the slight messenger of death, never missing the particular bird at which it was aimed. The stricken bird, apparently unheeded by its companions, flew off, but had seldom gone more than a dozen or fifteen yards when

it fluttered, fell to the ground, not dead, but paralyzed, and was immediately seized and killed. Felice made, as we should say, a handsome bag in just no time.

"I was apart, and at some distance from her, contemplating with awe and wonder the, to me, novel magnificence of sea and landscape, when she touched me gently on the arm.

"Step with me this way, Señor," she said, "and I will show you a fisherman such as I think you can never have seen before. Tread softly and don't show yourself. You have no gun, and my arrows would avail but little should he take a fancy to have flesh as well as fish for his dinner."

Felice led me cautiously towards a creek of the Amazon, into which had fallen the partly uprooted trunk of a mimosa tree, projecting some thirty feet into the river. Upon that was stretched one of the hugest jaguars I have ever seen. Jaguars are generally black, but spotted ones are not rare, and this was one of the spotted kind. *It was fishing*; its green eyes glared voraciously into the river; its deadly forepaw prepared to dart out at any fish that came within its reach, and sufficiently near the surface, when it was instantly *speared* by the creature's claws, and transferred to its insatiable maw.

"This curious jaguar-fishing greatly interested, amused me. It was not, however, apparently so successful as the tiger's appetite required. The animal began to glare fiercely around; its tail stiffened, curled upwards as with electric force; its glare settled in the direction where I and Felice were concealed. We were to windwards; and the tiger's keen scent had, no doubt, as Felice suggested might happen to be the case, revealed to him the proximity of a *piece de resistance* with which to agreeably finish his dinner. Quickly obeying the girl's significant gesture,

I was off after her at the double, not caring to halt till safe again within the Mission House. Dinner was just ready to be hoisted up by basket, rope and pulley to the sanctum, and there, after an unconscionably long Latin grace, which is *de rigueur* with priests of the Order of Jesus, I and the Padre dined and wined together in great jollity, literally above the world of jaguars, mosquitoes, and all mundane plagues whatsoever."

"When's the pith of the story coming, Doctor?" murmured Harry Roland a little thickly. "The shell of it is so confoundedly dry, that I'm being really overcome in the endeavour to moisten it. For shame, you ancient sinner, to beguile ingenuous youth in such—ah well, go on; come to the end of it if that ain't cut off! Go ahead, old boy!"

"The sooner you are in your sleeping berth the better, Mr. Roland. You won't be much longer out of it, if it depends upon me.

"Captain Marston's broken leg progressed favourably, and we awaited with impatience the coming down the Amazon of the *Pelican*, American schooner. Whilst so waiting, I often strolled forth, when the heat of the day had to a considerable extent subsided, to some distance in the forest, but always armed with a double-barrelled fowling-piece, loaded with ball.

"Well, one day—one evening rather—as I live, my back seems to open and shut when I think of it, I was returning to the station in tranquillest, serenest mood, when that pleasant peace of mind was rudely broken in the suddenest, most alarming way. Glancing through an opening in the trees, I saw that the forest was beginning to awake for the night much earlier than usual, and the wild beasts to creep forth in search of their prey.

“ While admitting their unquestionable right to whatever supper they could secure, I had a natural objection to providing them with that meal, so quickened my pace, looking cautiously behind—before me. Good Heavens ! Not fifty yards behin l, and seemingly hot on my track, was—not a four-footed foe—but a painted, befeathered Indian, armed with a rifle. I had observed him lounging in the distance before Felice left me, an hour previously ; but his movements then had excited no suspicion. Now they were undoubtedly menacing, and I grew very nervous.

“ You needn’t raise your eyebrows, Mr. Roland, in that sort of way. Stop till your turn comes—as I have no doubt it will.

“ I can have made no enemy of an Indian,” resumed the Surgeon, “ was my first thought, still——

“ I moved on more quickly when I was brought up, all standing, as sailors say, and with a vengeance. Lying in the open near a winding spur of the fishing creek spoken of was crouched a spotted jaguar, the same, it struck me, I had seen fishing—its glaring eyes fixed upon a deadly brown snake, which was also it seemed, uneasily watching the tiger.

“ Now it was absolutely essential, I could not do otherwise, to pass between the serpent and tiger, who, the moment I broke cover, would, I had little doubt, concentrate their joint attention—at first at all events, upon me. And glancing furtively over my shoulder, I saw, and there could be no mistake about it, the armed Indian coming fiercely on after me. *Whe-ee-ew !* I tell you my back opens and——”

“ Confound your back ! ” broke in Harry, “ and your brains too, for that matter. Can’t you go on, now you are coming to a *little* pith ? ”

"I excuse you young man," replied the Surgeon. "You are hardly in a responsible state of mind just now.

"In my fright and flurry," continued the Doctor, "I remembered, or thought I did, hearing Felice say that the near flash and report of a gun often frightened away jaguars, serpents—wild beasts of all kinds. I would try. Raising my doubled-barrelled piece to my shoulder, I fired, intending only to pull one trigger, but in the hurry I pulled both, the kick of the piece—perhaps I didn't hold it close enough, I had not often handled such things—the kick of the piece nearly broke my shoulder bone, the gun almost jumped out of my hands, and, gracious, what an infernal uproar instantly ensued !

"The jaguar in front sprang up with a roar, the brown snake raised its venomous crest, and the chattering of monkeys, screaming of birds, hissing of serpents, intermingled with the deep bass of numerous tigers, though at a distance, made a hellish uproar, to bewilder terribly a stronger nerved man than I can boast of being. Again, glancing amidst the horrid tumult over my shoulder, I saw the Indian within thirty yards taking deliberate aim at me. Heavens ! when I think of it !"

"That's right, Doctor," said Roland sympathetically, "take a hearty pull. It was a fix to test what a fellow's made of. But you must have got out of it since you are here. How was it managed ? Felice with her poisoned arrows to the rescue, eh !"

"Not at all. In my desperation I broke cover, with the intention of running the tiger and snake gauntlet, and as I did so, the Indian's rifle bullet whistled past my head, wounding my left ear ; here is the mark.

"The instant I came in sight, the jaguar, with a fierce roar, crouched for its deadly spring. I could hear the

Indian crashing along close at my back. Still on I stumbled, and at the next step or two fell over a piece of fallen timber, prone on my face, at the very flash of time the jaguar made its spring.

"I was not hurt, not even stunned, and was immediately again on my feet, glaring bewilderedly about. The jaguar missing me in consequence of the lucky stumble I had made, had leapt plump upon the Indian, and the two brutes were struggling fiercely on the ground ; the Indian fighting with his knife, which he had got out of the wampun belt, the jaguar tearing with its terrible claws. It was a fearful sight !

"'Where,' I mechanically exclaimed, 'where is the snake ?'

"'The snake has glided away,' said Felice, who that moment came up. 'This is terrible,' she added, 'load your gun—one barrel—you cannot ? Give it me.'

"Felice charged one barrel in just no time, stepped closely up to the tiger, still tearing away, heedless of us, at the wretched Indian, put the muzzle close to the beast's ear, fired, and the tiger rolled off, dead !

"'Ha !' said Felice tearing off the feathered head-dress of the terribly lacerated man, and gazing intently at him for two or three seconds, 'this is no Indian. Do you know this face, Señor ?' she added.

"I did. It was the face of Señor Cazias."

CHAPTER IV.

IN RIO JANEIRO.

JUST at this, the climax of his little adventure, the Surgeon was called away. A very worthy if not very valiant gentleman—essentially a lover of peace though wearing buttons, he really seemed, whilst relating it, to live over again the unpleasant three or four minutes during which his scare must have lasted, so pale and agitated had he become.

He would favour us with the sequel, and no doubt profound the moral of the story at some future time.

Left to ourselves, a strong revulsion of feeling immediately came over Roland and myself. The sort of royster ing mood, whieh drinking to an unusual excess had enabled us to assume, vanished with the Doetor, and the shuddering terror excited by Reginald Elsworthy's horrible death—the dark shadow of that death, whieh we had striven to cast behind us—returned, encompassing us in yet deeper gloom.

We would go to bed at once. We rose to do so, clasped hands, and as, looking in each other's eyes, we said good-night, burst into tears.

Buoyaney of spirit, never long separated from youth, health, and a conscience unblotted with serious stains, returned with the morning light.

The day was remarkably fine, there was a pleasant breeze; and as the ship, with its white wings fully displayed, bowled along over the glittering, silvery-blue sea, young

life and love in sunniest aspect, accompanied with bright visions—Emily would be just then awakening from soft slumber, having dreamt, perchance, regretfully of her banished boy-lover—again with radiant finger pointed onward to a gay, joyous future, unchequered by cloud or storm, unsaddened by prophetic strains of the still, sad music of humanity.

We were within a day's sail, Captain Burton informed us, should the breeze hold, of the Brazilian capital, where, soon after arriving, we should probably, according to the Doctor's prognostications, get involved, unless we were wary and wise much beyond our years, in no end of dangers and devilments, both in civilised and uncivilised society, in city and forest, Beauty and Beast being anxiously in wait to devour us.

It would at all events, if he proved right, be a lively life—we should not have to complain of the slow creeping lapse of time. That was something.

The Surgeon finished his story during the day. I will briefly as possible summarise all that remained for him to tell.

Senor Cazias, who, verifying Father Zenos's prediction had, prompted by the axiom that dead men tell no tales, treacherously attempted the Surgeon's life—been so mangled by the tiger, that he was fast bleeding to death.

Nothing could be done for him there; and Felice, with a piercing whistle she was never without, summoned assistance, which was not long in arriving.

Several negroes, armed with loaded muskets, answered the call. A rude litter was formed, and the dying man conveyed gently as possible to the Mission-house.

He expired during the night; and though he did not utter a word, it was plain by the expression of his eyes

that he was quite sensible of all that was passing, of his own state, knew that he who was ministering to him, endeavouring to alleviate his sufferings, was the man whom he had twice sought to murder.

That knowledge must surely have touched, softened a heart of stone, pulsating in its last, expiring throb! Not a scrap of paper was found on his person, and the whereabouts of his confederate Romero consequently remained unknown. The Surgeon had not since seen or heard of him. No attempt to obtain the money lying at the Imperial Bank had been made. ²²

On the fourth day after Cazias' death, the *Pelican* schooner touched at the missionary station. The skipper, James Bunt, willingly consented to give a passage—for good consideration of course—to Captain and Miss Marston, the Doctor and Felice, who with Padre Zenos' cheerful assent, much as he would miss her, engaged herself as personal attendant to the Captain's daughter. Miss Marston has taken a great liking, a strong interest in the intelligent, courageous, Carib girl.

Preparations to embark as quickly as possible were made, the more promptly that it was greatly feared Captain Marston's pursuers were at length upon the right track, and not far off. The Mission-house would prove no sanctuary for him, from the godless ruffians who held him in chase.

Everything was soon in readiness, Miss Marston had gone on board the schooner, which was anchored at several hundred yards off the shore, to have everything in readiness for her father; a comfortable litter had been got ready for the invalid, whose embarkation the Surgeon and Felice remained to personally superintend.

Final adieux had been made; Felice had received

upon her knees the Padre's solemn blessing, and four stout negroes were moving with the litter towards the shore, when a loud, hoarse shout, a roar of triumph, broke upon their startled ears.

A band of between twenty and thirty horsemen—the worthy Doctor was too much frightened, we may be sure, to count very exactly—were riding towards them at a swift gallop. The fellows wore a kind of uniform—had rifles slung at their backs, and came on with brandished swords.

No resistance could possibly be offered. Captain Marston was rudely seized, and spite of the Surgeon's remonstrances, lifted out of the litter, placed securely upon one of the horses, and a few minutes only having passed since they came in sight, the whole lot galloped off, and were quickly lost to view in the forest.

The Surgeon favoured us with a very moving description of Miss Marston's grief, consternation, despair, with which I need not refresh my present audience. Tears, lamentations, rage, could, however, avail nothing; and the schooner, a few hours afterwards, lifted anchor and dropped down the mighty river, with Miss Marston and the Surgeon on board, it having been thought advisable that Felice should remain, for a while at least, in order to discover, if possible, some trace of the direction taken by the band of ruffians. Miss Marston proposed endeavouring to enlist the active sympathy of the English envoy at Rio Janeiro, in her father's behalf.

Whether she had succeeded or not, the Surgeon could not say, as he accepted the post of surgeon to the *Dolphin* very soon after their arrival at Rio, and was now on his return voyage thither.

He remained in that city long enough, however, to

know that a former intimate acquaintance and friends' ip which had subsisted between Madam Elsworthy and Miss Marston had been renewed, and that the ladies appeared to be attached to each other with extraordinary warmth.

"But you, young gentlemen," concluded the Surgeon, "will soon know more about that, and the *et ceteras*, near and remote in connection with it, than I do, or I am much mistaken. All I can say is, take care. You are both young, overflowing with fine animal spirits, no doubt susceptible, in the very dawn and flush of a bright day, which bringing forth the serpent, craves wary walking. Not that I mean to compare Ellen Marston to a serpent; far from me be such a thought. I only say, be wise—bold, if you like—not rash."

"In plain English," said Roland, "you advise us not to make two confounded tools of ourselves. *I shan't*, be quite sure. As for Sabine, there is certainly no accounting for him, poor stricken deer; but Harry Roland, depend upon it, Doctor, is beauty and bamboozlement proof."

"*Qui vivra verra*," said the Surgeon; "shall we go down to lunch?" Agreed to without a division.

The next day at about noon, the *Dolphin* sailed into the magnificent bay, land-locked harbour rather, of Janeiro, an islet dotted expanse of deep water, twenty-four miles from north to south, fifteen miles in width, and over one hundred and twenty miles in circuit! All the war-navies of the world might ride securely there in any weather.

The entrance is between two projecting fort-crowned tongues of rock, about three-quarters of a mile apart. Several of the islets in the bay, Isla das Cobras, Isla de Lagen and others, are fortified, so that supposing the

gunners to be worth their salt, the Bahia de Janeiro would be found, it occurred to me, a hardish nut for even a British fleet to crack.

The city of San Sebastian de Rio de Janeiro is on the western shore of the bay, and sheltered by lofty hills. In common with other Iberian cities in the new as in the old world, it is distance that lends an enchantment to its aspect, which closer scrutiny at once dissolves.

Rio unquestionably has a very striking appearance as seen on a summer's noon from the deck of a ship entering the bay, the glittering church spires, towering above all of which shoot upwards the pointed towers and pinnacles of the cathedral, consecrated to Nossa Señora da Gloria; the red roofs of the houses, glowing and glancing in the burning rays of a southern sun, giving an expression of picturesque splendour which dazzles the beholder.

But, it is all soon found to be mere show and glitter. I do not allude merely to the mean, narrow, ill-kept streets—London in certain quarters may challenge competition in that respect; but to the languor, the listlessness, which seems to pervade all the cities of South America. There is no active, vigorous life pulsating through them.

The population, numbering, I believe, about two hundred thousand, about one half of whom are slaves, move about as if motion, exertion of the mildest kind, was a hardly endurable infliction. The very horses and mules participate in the prevalent disease of invincible laziness. I noticed the rowing of the boats in the bay—boats belonging to the Brazilian war vessels at anchor there. It was the same languid listlessness, on the water as on land, and I at once comprehended how it was that an empire, fifteen or sixteen times as large as France, and

abounding in natural wealth, counts for so little in the scale of nations, and though of earlier birth than the United States, is still a stunted feeble, whom one vigorous grasp of the young northern giant would crumble into dust.

Enough of commonplace comments. We shall soon be practically studying Brazilian South American life, in its individual, semi-civilised, and wholly savage existence.

Harry and I did not care to go on shore that day. We preferred that the Surgeon should encounter the first storm of grief, which would naturally burst forth at the announcement of Reginald Elsworthy's death. The domestic atmosphere would be clearer, pleasanter afterwards.

The Doctor was gone two or three hours. On his return he told us that the brother, Mr. Edmund Elsworthy, a thoroughly acclimatised gentleman both in a moral and physical sense, had expressed a no doubt sincere but mild resigned regret for his brother's sad fate—he scarcely remembered him personally—and sent us, Harry Roland and myself, a pressing invitation to dine with him *en famille* that evening, and make his house our home as long as we remained in Rio.

"Madame Elsworthy joins in the invitation, and Miss Ellen Marston," added the Doctor, "said to me, in confidence of course, that she should be much pleased to make the acquaintance of two such chivalrous Paladins, countrymen of her own, too, as I could not help describing you to be."

"Chivalrous young Paladins be smothered," exclaimed Harry. "What the plague, Doctor, can you mean by setting that devoted daughter at two young fellows who have nothing on earth to do, that I see in this part of the world, but to get, be led or drawn, into some abominable

scrape or other ! But, there, we have free souls, mine at least is free, and by the Lord Harry I'll take care to keep it so."

"The young Carib girl, Felice," said the Surgeon, "is with Miss Marston. She discovered, it seems, the track of the ruffian horsemen who carried off the Captain, and followed it up till it terminated in a Paraguayan prison. Captain Marston lies therein under sentence of death, which may, at any moment, be carried into execution. The British representative here could hold out no hope of effectual intercession in his behalf."

"I should have supposed that would be the case," said I. "The Captain's fate is a sad one, no doubt, and I am sorry for him and his daughter ; but it is really a matter in which we cannot be expected to take a very deep—more than fellow-countryman—interest. I shall be glad to see Felice, the Carib girl," I added. "At what hour are we expected at the Elsworthys?"

"They dine at eight ; it is now five o'clock. We have plenty of time. Mr. Elsworthy lives in splendid style, and is making, I am told, an immense fortune. He owns the most extensive sugar-houses and rum distilleries in Rio. These are, of course, situated in the old town. Mr. Elsworthy's private residence is in the Cidade Novo. It is a pleasant family to be acquainted with."

We went on shore at the agreed time, crossed the Campa de Saint Anna, a large square, separating the old from the new town of Rio, one side of which is made up of the Imperial palace.

Mr. Elsworthy's mansion in the Calle Mayor, a handsome street leading out from the south-west angle of the great square, was one of the best, and the establishment altogether was mounted on a splendid scale. Wealth

was lavishly displayed in every detail. There was a gaudiness, an ostentation manifested throughout, which did not harmonise with English taste in such matters ; still, Señor Elsworthy's was, unquestionably, a very splendid domicile, even for a millionaire.

Madame Elsworthy, too, was, as the Doctor reported, a very charming lady ; one of the handsomest creoles I have seen. Her husband struck me as an unmistakeably money-making—we won't say money-grubbing man. On no other subject save wealth and the means of acquiring it did he converse with more than faint, half-simulated interest. Quite true, that he was thoroughly acclimatised. His very English had a Brazilian twang. His brother Reginald's terrible fate was only alluded to by him in the same kind of commiserating tone in which he probably would have spoken of a fatal accident having befallen a favourite horse.* Madame Elsworthy was, I quickly discerned, the real head of the great house.

Miss Ellen Marston received us graciously—with a stately graciousness. Her beauty, which was no doubt remarkable—but, no more to be compared with—pshaw ! —there is no agreeing about tastes—the lady's certainly remarkable statuesque beauty was shadowed, as with a mourning veil, by a silent sorrow, it could not be doubted by any one who, like myself, but partially knew her story, by a silent sorrow dwelling at her heart.

Her manner was reticent, reserved, and she spoke very little ; but there was a tone of patient sadness in that little which could scarcely fail to awaken sympathetic echoes in any feeling heart.

One thing was signally apparent. The young lady was no husband, no lover-huntress—had conceived no sinister design of subjugating, with ulterior views, such tender,

susceptible young hearts as Roland's and mine. My friend Harry might make himself quite comfortable in that respect. The Doctor, either out of bantering fun or pure simplicity of heart, had been bamboozling us.

This was unmistakeably clear, and to Roland, it seemed to me, somewhat mortifyingly so. He was evidently struck with the lady—an important, though by her quite unnoticed, fact. Her thoughts, if not dwelling upon sublimer things, were ranging over, sounding loftier keys than the boy and girl love gamut can ever reach. The avenging light of passionate scorn which shot from her dark, dreamy eyes when the names of President Lopez and a General Caballero were incidentally mentioned was abundant proof of that. In sooth, the queenly demoiselle, after the first introduction, scarcely seemed to notice such common young fellows as Harry and I.

At dessert, Felice the Carib girl came in to speak with her mistress. I observed her with much interest. She was a lithe, springy, I may add, graceful maiden.

The Surgeon had truly said, that the remarkable intelligence manifest in her countenance, the courageous good-humour, if I may so express myself, which shone in her glowing eyes, fully redeemed, in my estimation at least, the repulsive Carib-caste of features, and a dinginess of complexion, which was, however, much lighter, shading somewhat more into olive, than is usual in her race. There was, perhaps, a cross in her blood.

The message, whatever it was, brought by Felice to Señora Marston, evidently caused that lady considerable emotion. Whether of a pleasurable or unpleasant kind, her heightened colour and flashing inquisition of the message-bearer's countenance did not indicate to a casual onlooker.

Felice left the room with an answer to the message, returned in a few minutes, said something in a low voice, immediately on hearing which Miss Marston rose, apologised to Madame Elsworthy, bowed generally, and left the room.

There were now present only our host and hostess, the Surgeon, Roland, and myself.

"Those mysterious negotiators again, no doubt," said Madame Elsworthy, whose manner had suddenly become troubled, anxious. "I am terribly afraid, Edmund, that some conspiracy is on foot affecting, not only the worldly prospects of Ellen Marston, but her personal safety."

"I fear so, too, Caterina. The marvellous part of the affair is that, although at your request I have offered any at all reasonable amount of ransom money for the release of Captain Marston, the only answer was that all the money I possess could not procure his liberation. And yet that scoundrel Lopez, who has plunged us into this war, which, whatever other result it may have—one, I hope, will be hanging him as high as Haman—is sure to paralyse business, throw commerce into confusion. That rascal Lopez, I say, who rejected my offer, is as needy, barren of resources as such an unscrupulous tyrant can be. There is something more than natural in this, if philosophy could but find it out," added Mr. Edmund Elsworthy, wiping his forehead of the perspiration which the very unusual animation, excited by prospective commercial derangement, had brought on.

"There can be no harm in speaking out before our young friends, as they already know from the Doctor here almost as much as we do of the affair," said Madame Elsworthy. "The truth seems to be that Captain Marston is the depositary of a secret—a state secret or intrigue,

which Lopez and others are desirous to obtain the particulars of, in order that they may wreak their vengeance upon the traitors, as they deem them, who may be implicated. Captain Marston, a man of firm will, dares death, it appears, in any form, rather than betray his friends, and it is hoped that his daughter, whom he passionately loves—what father, indeed, would *not*?—may induce him to comply with his captor's wishes."

"Quite true, Caterina," said her husband. "But what can we do more than we have done? Ellen, who used to be so frank, so free-minded with us, has of late become reserved, uncommunicative; is rarely confidential except with her Carib attendant."

"Ellen," said Madame Elsworthy, "believes she would irretrievably peril Captain Marston's life should she divulge the nature of the negotiation she has been induced to enter upon. But let us change the subject. All the talk in the world will not influence the result."

"And so, young gentlemen," continued Madame Elsworthy, with assumed gaiety of tone, "you are desirous of sporting over the forests and wilds of Brazil and adjacent countries? It is a bold adventure, and I wish you not only excellent sport—that you will be sure of, in possibly over lavish measure—but a happy return and deliverance."

"Yes," said the husband. "And if you are content with tapirs, pigeons, deer, parrots, hares, monkeys—excellent eating, monkeys are said to be—you need not go far from Rio to find that kind of game in abundance. If you are ambitious of looking up tigers, wild boars, boa constrictors, crocodiles, serpents in venomous varieties, two or three days' riding will bring you into the thick of them. Well, rather you than me; but I daresay

such ‘sport’ is attractive to youthful, adventurous natures.”

Madame Elsworthy remarked that what she should most dread would be the serpents, cobras, and especially brown snakes, with which, she understood, the forests swarmed.

The Doctor said the fear of snakes and serpents was to a great extent imaginary. They, as a rule, shunned man. “The South American cobra,” he added, “isn’t so deadly, and does not resemble in appearance the spectacled serpent of India. The bite of the brown snake was fatal, almost instantly so, but they were not numerous. It is a curious fact,” added the Surgeon, “that the reptile’s bite does not harm itself. Von Humboldt relates that he, or one of his suite, seized a brown snake and compelled it to bite its own tail, but no perceivable result followed.”

“A curious fact, do you call that?” exclaimed Harry Roland, who, since Miss Marston left the room, had fallen into a state of dreamy abstraction. “What nonsense! The serpent, depend upon it, had a very distinct idea of WHAT it was biting. Suppose a sinful soldier were ordered to give himself thirty lashes, do you think he would have a very sore back after the infliction? I should have thought Humboldt had more common sense. I believe, however,” added Roland, “that in the pathless wildernesses of Indian America, the savage man is much more to be feared than four-footed or creeping brutes.”

Finding our resolution held, Mr. and Madame Elsworthy promised to find us two trustworthy guides—negroes both, who were also skilled in forest-craft.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE FOREST.

At the appointed time, daybreak, on the third morning after our arrival, everything was in readiness. We ourselves were befittingly equipped in hunting gear, our weapons were in excellent order, and we were provided with hardy, swift, serviceable horses.

The negro guides were also mounted, and each had a sumpter mule under his charge, loaded with various requisites, light cocoa-fibre, mattresses, &c., to serve as shake-downs in our forest bivouacs, brandy, and so on.

The morning was splendid, we were in highest spirits, had bidden our excellent host and hostess good-bye; with Miss Marston we had exchanged farewells on the previous evening, and were just about to spring to saddle and be off—

“Our pleasure in the Brazil woods
Three summer weeks to take”

—that being the time to which our first excursion was limited, when Felice the Carib girl came out of the house and, in a whisper, asked to speak with us apart.

We of course instantly acceded to her request—Harry with suspicious eagerness, I could not help thinking. Felice led the way to a private room, then hurriedly and with some confusion of manner, speaking in French by the way, which, though not exactly the French of France, I understood better than Brazilian Portuguese, said she

spoke for herself only, and not for Mademoiselle Marston, and proceeded.

" You intend, Messieurs, I believe, to visit Señor Martinez, the sugar cultivator, a friend of Madame Elsworthy, who resides near Rosaria, about three days' horse journey from Rio ? "

We did. It had been so settled.

" Mademoiselle Marston," continued Felice, " has been persuaded to accompany certain persons to a place not far from Rosaria. We start this afternoon. I am afraid for Mademoiselle—of what or why I hardly know. But I should be glad, in case of danger or calamity, to know where in the wilderness I might find two brave gentlemen and friends, who——"

" Assure Mademoiselle Marston," impetuously broke in Harry Roland, " that she may count upon me—upon us both in any extremity."

" Pardon me, Monsieur," interrupted Felice, " I have already said that Mademoiselle has not commissioned me to speak with you. I am acting from my own heart, interpreting my own fears ! "

" I understand," said Harry. " Shall we remain near Rosaria till we hear from you ? "

" Ah ! if you would be so generous—but it might upset your plans—derange your itinerary."

" The devil take the itinerary !" responded Harry. " We will remain near Rosaria till we hear from you. Will we not, Sabine ? "

I nodded assent. Felice, much pleased, vanished, and we returned to our horses, I humming, as we strode along—

" C'est l'amour, l'amour, l'amour
Qui du monde fait la ronde
Et chaque jour à son tour
Tout le monde fait l'amour ; "

which little ditty Roland, as he sprang lightly to saddle, rudely interrupted.

The vicinage of Rio was flashing in all its summer glory of tropical vegetation as we rode through its fragrant groves and glades of palm, cocoa, fig, laurel, pomegranate, orange-trees. As we advanced into the interior, by the route marked out for us, and the sparsely scattered signs of semi-civilisation gradually disappeared, the wild grandeur of the wilderness, into the gloomy coverts of which we were recklessly plunging more deeply with every passing hour, profoundly oppressed us with a sense of the majesty of material nature, of the impotence, littleness of man. Not a philosophical reflection, perhaps, but one that, nevertheless, makes itself felt by every one who, for the first time, finds himself alone with the silent grandeur, the sombre solitude of a primeval, pathless forest.

Nothing of sporting interest occurred on the first or second day's ride, or during the night when we bivouacked, circled by fire, in the forest. Birds of various kinds and plumage we might have shot by scores, but of heroic game, not even a wild boar did we so much as sight.

Towards the close of the afternoon of the second day, Harry, followed by his negro, bearing a lasso, glimpsed an ostrich at a considerable distance, and at once set off at full speed in pursuit. I declined accompanying them, and began preparing with my Pedro for the night's bivouac.

We had abundance of *munitions de bouche*, both liquid and solid; I dined heartily, enjoyed a quiet, soothing smoke, and was dozing, if not positively asleep, when Pedro touched my arm, roused me, and I found that night was fast closing in. The stars were out, the firma-

ment sparkled with golden fire, bringing out the forest giants in pale ghostliness of outline, a cold wind was shivering through the leaves ; yet Roland had not returned.

Where could he be loitering ? There was not much fear that he would fail to rejoin us, as the two negro guides had agreed upon the place of bivouac for the night, a spot known to both.

Still, as time drew on I became uneasy at their absence, and taking my loaded rifle, strode off to a considerable distance where, by ascending a tall mimosa tree, I could see for a long way off in the direction Roland had taken.

I climbed the tree easily enough, and having reached the summit of the trunk, placed my foot upon, as I thought, a thick round branch, intending to spring from it to a higher limb.

To my great consternation I instantly was made aware that I was treading upon the body of a huge boa constrictor, asleep and coiled round one of the mimosa's branches !

The monster, astonished, no doubt, that his tail should be taken such liberties with, instantly awoke, lifted up its hideous head, and with distended jaws, would the next moment have enfolded me in its horrible embrace, but for the swifter action of my ready rifle. Quick as thought, or more correctly without thought, for which there was no time, I thrust the mouth of the barrel into that of the serpent, and pulled the trigger. The hideous head was smashed into smithereens, and the loathsome body, slowly unwinding by its own weight, fell upon the ground.

Quits for the fright in my first encounter with the heroic game of Brazil ! I hastily descended the mimosa, not being at all sure that there might not be a Mrs.

Boa near at hand to avenge her consort, and rejoined Pedro.

He, of course, had heard the report of the rifle, but thought I fired as a signal of our whereabouts, and impatience of my friend's long absence.

In about ten minutes Harry and his attendant made their appearance, very tired and hungry, and *without* the ostrich, which they had failed to shoot or lasso.

Such small ruffles are easily smoothed out by savoury supper and generous wine, and we lay down on our cocoa-fibre mattresses, within a fire circle, which the negroes alternately watched to keep up, in a very placid, cheerful state of mind, the horses and mules having, of course, been securely tethered.

At all events I did, and at once fell into tranquil slumber—not dreamless, oh no! but it was not the serpent's fold which half-circled my waist, nor snaky eyes that lightened into mine.

I awoke just as day was dawning. The magnificence of the scene spread out around as morning came blushing up the cloudless sky, and gradually lit up the gorgeous forest foliage, with quivering prismatic splendour, perfectly awed me by its divine significance—its vivid illustration of the Almighty fiat, “Let there be light”—infinitely more than could many sermons.

The fires were nearly extinguished; the negroes both asleep like my friend Harry, and I strode into the open. The silence was intense, unbroken; not a breath crept through the rosy air, or stirred the lightest leaf.

Here in very truth was a magnificent abode prepared for man; a table set for him in the wilderness, which in God's good time it would be his to redcem and civilise. Man's precursors, the brutes which roamed those vast

solitudes, having no knowledge of death, lived only in the present, and would pass away. To humanity alone had it been given to possess the past, the present, and the future ; because, O my soul, thou art a spirit of immortal life and——“ Hillo ! what’s that ? ”

Whilst thus rhapsodising I had unconsciously approached the edge, so to speak, of a dense forest covert, and the sound which cut short my heroics was the unmistakeable deep bass growl of the jaguar ! Glancing round I perceived *two* black jaguars, with their green eyes flashing upon me, through the long grass in which they lay crouched, seeming to indicate an eager appetite for breakfast, which they were making up their minds to gratify at any hazard.

I never till that startling moment quite believed in what is called spontaneous combustion. Those four glaring eyes dispelled my scepticism, red-hot as I instantly became from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. What unarmed man would not have been, at finding himself sudden'y confronted by two hungry tigers, within leaping distance ?

That panic-terror lasted only for a few hurried heart-beats. I had believed myself to be totally defenceless, without a weapon of any kind. That was happily not the case. My hunting-knife, a broad-bladed keen bowie, was in my belt, which I had not put off when lying down to sleep. It was quickly in my firm grip, and I was comparatively my own man again.

I had also slcpt in the short cloak common to the country, manufactured of a stout dark green cloth, called Paka. Keeping a bold front to the hesitating jaguars, my eyes fixed on theirs, I quickly unclasped the cloak, and wrapped it round my left arm in several folds, which

neither jaguar teeth nor claws could penetrate. This done I dropped on one knee, shouting loudly as I did so, in the hope of awakening Roland and the negroes, or at all events the two forest watch-dogs belonging to Pedro and José.

This I felt—moments at such a time counting for hours—to be a somewhat forlorn hope, as regarded saving me from the tigers' ravenous jaws, I having, I feared, wandered in my maunding mood to a considerable distance from the fire circle within which I left Harry and the blacks dead asleep.

Their position, by the way, was not so perilous as most persons might suppose it to be, our night bivouac having been pitched in a wide open space, and guarded by the dogs, not fighting animals indeed, and only about the size of an English spaniel, but readily wakeful, and with a keen scent for tiger and serpent odours. They also were asleep, or apparently so, when I rose and strode off, but the near approach, I had been assured, of either biped, quadruped, or reptile would instantly rouse them from vulpine slumber, and make them give tongue loud enough to awaken a dead-deaf sleeper.

The motive for dropping on my left knee was this: jaguars, like all the tiger tribe, have a terrible knack of ripping you up with one of their sharp-clawed tearing paws, whilst striking you down with the other. That pleasant tiger-trick could not be so easily performed upon a man in a kneeling position, as when he stands upright. Besides securing this advantage, I was lucky enough to be able to plant my right foot firmly against a heavy log of wind-strewn timber, and should not be easily knocked over by the jaguar's first and always deadliest spring.

I should endeavour to receive his blow upon my cloaked

arm, and if strength and courage did not fail me at the decisive moment, the bowie knife would effectually do its work.

In those moments of flashing thoughts, I did not take account of the wily instinct, characteristic, I had heard, of the jaguar, of which wily instinct I was favoured with an immediate and vivid illustration.

The tigers had risen to their feet or paws, their arching backs, flaming eyes, and impatiently wagging tails, plainly indicating their rapidly matured opinion that the time for decisive action had arrived, when one of them, sagaciously observant of the defensive position I had assumed, bounded off with a terrific, but on his part imprudent, roar to the right, and in one or two circuitous leaps, brought himself upon my flank, which he quite evidently intended to assail simultaneously with his companion's attack in front.

This was more than I had mentally bargained for, I having hastily concluded that I should only—a charming only—have to receive and settle, as I best might, with one tiger at a time.

This last manœuvre of my feline friends terribly increased the odds against me, and yet I was not so much frightened as I ought reasonably to have been. Probably because I had no time to be, but a very, very brief interval—many words as it has taken me to describe the scene—having elapsed since I became aware that two full-grown famished tigers were contemplating my person with such lively interest.

The jaguar in front was the most eager for breakfast. He leapt at me with a furious roar and an impetus which, although I succeeded in shielding myself from his tearing jaws and talons by my cloaked arm, knocked me back-

ward, yet not so suddenly as to prevent me plunging the bowie knife by mechanical impulse, as it were, up to the hilt in the beast's breast.

The stroke must have been instantly mortal. The animal's life blood gushed out over my face in a blinding stream, but not so much so as to conceal from me the fierce eyes of the brute suddenly glazing, darkening in death. Its muscles as instantaneously relaxed, the jaguar was unmistakeably dead, and with an exertion of strength which surprised myself, I threw its heavy carcase off, at the same moment that the crack of Harry Roland's rifle, and the yelps of the dogs, sounded sharply on my almost fainting ear.

Gazing confusedly about, I saw that jaguar number two had received his quietus, and was writhing in the agonies of death. Roland and the negroes were quickly at my side. Harry gently raised me up, ascertained that I was not materially hurt, administered the best of all medicaments in such cases, a plentiful dose of brandy, and supported me, for I was pretty much shaken, till we reached our bivouac, from which I had rashly wandered some three or four hundred yards. There, a good wash, and partaking, in the place of furnishing, a hearty breakfast, soon put me to rights, and with the help of cigars, restored a frame of mind capable of moralising on the unpleasant scare which I had thoughtlessly brought upon myself.

"Upon my word, Robert," said Harry, "I seriously believe, and your governor agreed with me, that from the day, or evening was it ? you first met with the original of '*Portrait charmant*,' you have had, if not a tile in your upper story completely off, several very much loosened. How else can such a freak as taking a solitary morning's walk, in a South American wilderness, teeming with brute

and savage life, oblivious, too, of the slightest caution, actually forgetful of your rifle, be accounted for? Just tell me?"

"The calm beauty of the morning, Harry, beguiled me into forgetfulness. God's peace seemed to rest upon, to embrace the earth, banishing for the time all thought of evil, of strife, violence of any kind. It seemed that——"

"Mere bosh and pumpkin!" interrupted Roland. "It's my opinion you were walking in your sleep; dreaming you were in the New Forest, and going to serenade '*Portrait charmant.*'"

"Did you wake up the jaguars, Bob, as you used to do that divinity, by unseasonably caterwauling 'Come into the garden, Maude?' I shouldn't much wonder if you did; nor at all that, if you did, it should have provoked the angry jaguar roar which awoke us, and, by Jove! but just in time."

"Truly but just in time. It was a fix, Harry, more perilous, I hope, than any extremity likely to befall Miss Marston, and from which you, through Felice, assured the young lady she might count upon us both, upon yourself principally, for of course *you* meant to rescue her!"

"That's a horse of quite another colour, Sabine," retorted Harry, blushing crimson for the first time since I had known him. "I shan't in any case," he continued, laughing, "go alone or unarmed to the rescue. I would not deprive you of even the lion's share of the danger and glory, if you are very desirous of it. Generous that, eh? I say, Pedro," he added, "how far are we now from Señor Martinez's sugar-farm—Rosaria?"

"About a day's ride," said Pedro; "we have not come quick. Felice," added the negro, "must be there now.

She and the Señora went a safer way ; not through this forest."

"They were wise not to do so. Now, let us pack up and be moving. Our services may, by this time, be required ; don't you think so, Bob ?"

"I think it is very likely indeed that they are, and I am SURE you have booked us both for a very Quixotic task. I may not draw back, but what effective aid could we two render if, as I vaguely understand it is feared may be the case, a posse of armed ruffians like those who seized and carried off Captain Marston from the Mission station, on the Amazon, meditate entrapping, have resolved to entrap his daughter, and hold her in captivity till the father, for his child's sake, consents to do or reveal something which to save his *own* life he obstinately refuses to do or to reveal?"

"There, don't croak, Robert !" said Henry pettishly. "If it were '*Portrait charmant*' that was likely to be entrapped, borne off into captivity, possibly to death, you would not count adverse odds so curiously. Boldness and brains may counterbalance numbers. But sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Let us get on, and endeavour to reach Rosaria before nightfall."

"Felice," said Pedro, "will know where to find you, Señors, if she wishes it. I told her exactly the way we should come. That was before Felice spoke to you, Señor Roland," added the man with a sly smile. "Señor Martinez has Indians, Guacho Indians, who could bring a letter straight to you."

"All right," said Harry, who seemed, however, somewhat surprised that Felice should have taken such precautionary pains to enable her to come upon us at any moment. "All right. Lead on, and smartly."

"I hope it may be 'all right,'" thought I ; "but I

don't at all admire the outlook of the affair. Not in the least."

We halted about noon on the border of an extensive green savannah, alive with the cries of myriads of tropical birds, and making the air a very pulsating rainbow by the flashing magnificence of their gorgeously coloured plumage.

Our negroes having first minutely examined the lofty tangled trees, in the deep shade of which we proposed to lunch, to make sure that no boa was taking his snake siesta over our heads, and likely to drop down upon us when least expected.

In the wilderness through which we had passed, we had not met with one human being, neither European, Creole, Indian, or Negro. Now, however, as after a full meal we were dozing, drowsily smoking, we became lazily conscious that on the far horizon of the savannah a straggling line of dark, nearly naked people were slowly passing along, each carrying a vessel of some kind, balanced on the head.

Harry Roland and I roused ourselves to take a good look through a telescope, and made them out distinctly enough. Questioning the negroes, we were informed that they were Guacho Indian women and girls of the same race as the Indians of the Pampas, vast plains, upon many parts of which cattle in immense numbers are bred and grazed.

These women and girls were carrying home on their heads, in half-baked earthen vessels, the milk which the coarse gnarled trunks of the cow-tree, growing on the scanty soil of rocks, afford in abundance when regularly tapped once a day. This provision of Providence is not, however, more remarkable than another, peculiar to other por-

tions of the Brazilian territory, where salt is not otherwise procurable. Numerous and extensive patches of land are periodically covered with a salt efflorescence—a harvest which never fails, and doubles, trebles the value of an estate on which it is found. This singular natural phenomenon has given rise to numerous contradictory theories as to its cause or causes, and its perennial sustentation, of the validity of which I am no competent judge. The favourite food, our darkies further informed us, of Guacho Indians was, with tree milk, a species of white, round-faced monkey, which, when properly roasted, is by Indian *gourmets* esteemed a choice delicacy. Europeans, Madame Elsworthy had incidently mentioned, were thought to be absurdly fastidious in declining to partake of such a savoury viand, because, forsooth, the monkey's face when cooked strikingly resembled that of a white baby !

We were languidly commenting upon these matters, the weather being intensely hot, and reluctant to bestir ourselves and push on, when Pedro and José, who like ourselves were more lazily inclined than usual, which in a Brazilian negro sense is saying much, started suddenly to their feet, with an inarticulate shout, at the same moment straining their eyes in one direction.

"What are you gazing at ?" asked Roland. "I see nothing."

"No, Señor, not yet: but you will presently," said Pedro. "Horses are coming at full gallop; horses *with iron shoes*. We know. Ah, there they are! Felice, the Señora Marston, one, two, three Indians; and, look, Señors, eight cavaliers in pursuit!"

This was indeed a startler! We, Harry and I, were woken up with a vengeance. In an instant or two we

were erect, had pulled ourselves together, and instinctively seized our rifles.

"The extremity, Harry," said I, not perhaps without some acrid bitterness of tone, "in presence of which you pledged your word we might be counted upon by Miss Marston, has cropped up rather suddenly; for most assuredly the foremost horsewoman, though she rides like a man, is Felice, the lady is the lady of your love, if you are not of hers. Felice sees us, waves a kerchief in token of joyous recognition. I cannot say that as far as regards myself the pleasure is quite mutual, still we must do our little best. Pedro, José, look to your rifles, and hand out our revolvers, in just no time."

The negroes did not readily understand our Portuguese, nor we theirs, and now they both seemed duller of comprehension than usual. Instead of handing out the revolvers, they timidly suggested the prudence of putting a belt of trees between us and the advancing horsemen and women.

"Get out the revolvers, will you, and cap them!" thundered Roland, whose blood was up. "Then hide yourselves if you like; we shan't. They are but eight, Robert," he added, "and we are four, if the niggers may count. No, you don't," he fiercely added, levelling his rifle; "no, you don't, if I know it. But I will only kill the horse!"

Harry fired with aim as steady as if shooting for a prize-cup; the bullet crashed into the skull of the horse of the foremost pursuer, who had seized Miss Marston's bridle-rein, and down toppled horse and rider.

The pursuers, naturally much astonished, pulled instantly up, and the next moment Roland, covered by my rifle and those of our negroes, who had recovered

heart as quickly as they seemed to have lost it, had Miss Marston in his arms, lifting her from saddle to ground. A proud, entrancing moment that for Harry Roland.

The three Indians who had been acting as guides and escort, and were armed with indifferent muskets, ranged up with us. The lady, who seemed perfectly self-possessed, was placed with the Carib maiden in the rear, and we presented an unquailing front to the pursuers. They were armed with rifles and sabres, and all the eight wore short cloaks and sombrero hats.

The fellow whose horse had been killed by Roland, having picked himself up, was the first to parley.

"Who are you," he fiercely exclaimed, "that presume to fire upon unoffending people, engaged in the fulfilment of their duty; that of arresting criminal fugitives?"

"Criminal fugitives be ——" exclaimed Harry, greatly excited, and speaking in English. Then in his odd, but sufficiently intelligible Portuguese, he added, "We are two Englishmen, and bound therefore to protect an English lady from such ruffians as you appear to be. Mark me, Señor," Harry went on; "mark me, Señor, I am a dead shot—I should not miss my man once in a hundred times! You are in command of those fellows—my rifle covers you, draw your scoundrels off, or by the Heaven above us, I will send you in a moment to the other place, whatever happens afterwards!"

The menace had the desired effect, temporarily at all events; the pursuing party withdrew beyond rifle range, and breathing time was gained.

CHAPTER VI.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

A CONSULTATION was held by the dismounted chief with his subordinates, the result of which, in so far as it could be known to us, was that the commandant, mounting one of the best horses in his troop, rode swiftly off in a westerly direction, leaving his men to observe and keep vigilant guard over us.

"They do not think themselves strong enough to attack us," said I, "and the leader has gone off, depend upon it, to bring a reinforcement."

There was concurrent assent to this from all our party. Miss Marston, who, as I have said, seemed perfectly self-possessed, came to the front.

"This is not a time for words," she said, in a tone and with a look to madden men, "or I might say much. My heart is full; but if you would save me, and in saving me from his persecutor lies the only chance of securing my father's safety, we must begone at once. And yet no chance is there of escape from those ruthless bloodhounds! My horse, that of Felice, those of the Guacho guides, are, as you see, blown, utterly incapable of rapid motion for but a short distance."

"And the only place for present shelter and safety," said Felice, "is Señor Martinez's residence, that is still a long distance off, and the ruffian Ronza's band bars the only road. Flight is impossible, more of Ronza's ruffians

are close at hand, and there is, I fear, but one hope, one chance left."

What was that hope, that chance, was eagerly demanded.

"A feeble hope, a sorry chance," said Felice, "but all that is left us. I am swift of foot, and very strong, vigorous. You, Señors, must entrench yourselves, in the best way possible, whilst I, by a circuitous route, till I am beyond sight of our pursuers, find my way to Señor Martinez's place. If you can hold out for, say four hours, help—effective help will be certain to arrive, and—ha ! Sancta Maria, Holy Mother of God ! We are lost !—lost ! There is no hope ! Look !"

We did not require to be told to look. The chief Ronza was already back with nine more fellows, accoutred like the rest.

"A decided case, friend Roland," said J, speaking in our tongue, and with a somewhat swash-buckler tone which anything but faithfully interpreted what I really felt ; "but people have, we sometimes read in novels, extricated themselves from as dire a peril. At all events, despondency won't help us. Let us immediately put a few trees between us and these seventeen brave fellows, who will presently be coming on, eager for the fray, and then take counsel of our courage only."

This was hurriedly effected ; but it was quite clear to me that the negroes and Guachos would be off at the double at the first attack. In fact we hadn't the ghost of a chance ; yet, if we surrendered, it was quite certain we, Harry and I at all events, if no one else, would be shot out of hand.

Sure of his prey, Ronza, closely followed by his fellows, rode fiercely towards us.

Pulling up when within seven or eight yards, he haughtily demanded our surrender.

"Upon what terms?" I asked.

"At discretion! I give you," he scornfully added, taking out his watch, "just five minutes to decide. Not one instant more!"

So saying he turned his horse's tail towards us, disdaining to waste more words upon such doomed, helpless wretches, and entered into conversation with two or three of his band.

"Harry Roland," said Miss Marston, placing her hand in Harry's, and with her burning eyes flaming into his, "you will not, cannot, dare not, permit me to fall *alive* into that miscreant Ronza's hands. There are things infinitely more terrible than death. If your heart fails you," added the half frenzied maiden, "give me your pistol; I'll do it myself."

"One moment, Miss Marston, if you please," said I. "There is another card to be played before this terrible game is finally lost and won; and not feeling at all disposed to slay myself or be butchered by others, I shall play it boldly, half believing it will turn out to be the master-card."

"You speak in riddles, sir. What can you mean?"

"My meaning, before we are two minutes older, will need no interpreter. I have one question to ask. This Ronza is the supreme, absolute chief, the master of yon band of ruffians?"

"Undoubtedly he is. They are his mercenaries, servants, slaves?"

"That's enough. Then here goes," I added, tightening my belt and ascertaining that my revolver was in its place. "I have done it, Harry, in sport, when a horse

has been going at full trot, and shall hardly fail so easy a jump now that it is a leap for life."

Roland did not comprehend ; yet my words and bearing excited a vague feeling of hope.

A brief, wordless, but fervent prayer to the Almighty Helper, and I darted out into the open, cleared the intervening space, placed my hands lightly upon the haunches of Ronza's horse, vaulted upon the animal's back, with one arm grasped Ronza round the waist by a grip of steel, with the other pressed the muzzle of my revolver to the temple of the astounded, terrified villain, before you could count ten !

" Hurrah !"

" Dare to struggle, resist," I exclaimed, " and I blow your brains out ! Wave, order your fellows away," I added, " or you are a dead man."

The horrified scoundrel did not need twice telling ! He yelled out to his men to retire, begone ! They, almost as much astounded as himself, obeyed ; I, of course, taking care to keep Ronza's body between me and them.

" Take—take your pistol from my head," brokenly gasped the cowardly caitiff. " It may go off. See, look, the men are going ! "

" Harry ! " I shouted, " Harry—all of you, mount, and close me round. Quick—the trick's done."

They were quick ; and I don't think more than three or at most four minutes had passed since I darted out from behind the partly concealing belt of trees, before, still utterly confounded, Ronza was securely thonged in our midst upon the back of one of the sumpter mules, and we, half wild with exultation, were moving on defiantly under the Guachos' guidance towards Señor Martinez's residence.

The sudden reaction, the swift passing from imminent death, as it seemed, to assured life, affected Miss Marston more than the peril to which she had been exposed. But for the indomitable nerve and active ministrations of Felice, she could not have sustained herself in the saddle. Our march was slow, and evening was closing in when we reached the hospitable and very welcome abode of Señor Martinez, safe, sound, and merry.

Ronza was shut up under strict surveillance, and an intimation was given that we should consider in the morning what was to be done with him.

Señor Martinez's establishment was an extensive one. There were between three and four hundred able-bodied men, negro slaves principally, in his service, who appeared to be attached to him and his family. There were plenty of fire-arms and ammunition in the house, and no danger, consequently, could be apprehended from Ronza's followers.

On the morrow, Miss Marston was to enlighten us as to the how and why of her having been placed in such dire peril of her life and honour.

That little exploit of mine called forth a great flourish of trumpets, when related and glorified by Harry Roland and Miss Marston; and yet, really, except indicating presence of mind in seizing the right moment of action, there was little to make such a fuss about. In itself nothing could be easier to an athletic young fellow, trained as I had been; and once I had Ronza in my grip, what could he do, if he wished not to have his head blown off?

Yet, though I was not such a vain fool as to be really puffed up by such ridiculously extravagant laudation, I was not a little gratified by the flattering gloss which

Miss Marston, writing at Roland's suggestion, to Emilie, for her special information, threw over the affair.

"By Jove!" said Harry, after reading aloud his copy of Miss Marston's note, "won't '*Portrait charmant*' be proud of her boy lover! Will you let me read what she writes, in return, about it? Oh, no! of course you won't! You are too selfish a fellow for that. I have a precious good mind," added Harry, "to write confidentially to Uncle Elsworthy, who is sure to repeat it to the aunt, Mrs. Alford, telling him it was Miss Marston's bright eyes—not the fast fading light of '*Portrait charmant's*'—that kindled heroic flame in Bob Sabine's inflammable but fickle heart. I say, old fellow, mind what you are about! That Bohemian glass decanter is one of a set, an heirloom in the Martinez family. If you shy it at my head, and smash it, there will be the deuce of a row. Ah, there goes Ellen. Good-bye, Bob, for an hour or two."

"Ellen already, is it?" thought I, as the door closed with a slam, and my fine-hearted young friend's bounding step echoed along the corridor. "I am much mistaken, Harry, if imagination, which, like hope, tells so many flattering tales, isn't fooling you. Yet, who shall say? The world turns round, as I suppose it ever did; and who can fathom a lady's mind? Not I, assuredly. Even Emilie——But I must tread lightly here. 'Tis sacred ground!"

CHAPTER VII.

LETTERS FROM HOME.

MISS MARSTON's promised explanation proved to be no explanation at all. No one that knew the lady would for a moment suspect or imagine she was influenced by any but the highest, purest motives, in resolving, after reflection, to keep all matters in which Captain Marston and herself were concerned shrcuded in mystery ; but the fact remained that she had involved, was involving, not herself alone, but others, notably that devoted Carib girl, Felice, Roland, and my very reluctant self, in the perilous business, whatever it might turn out to be.

Yes, and greater peril loomed very distinctly in the really illimitable perspective. One ominous fact was certain. Captain Marston was confined in a Paraguayan dungeon, and if some negotiations with Madame Lynch—a sort of left-handed wife to Lopez—were not successful, some one else's life, any number of lives, for that matter, would have to be jeopardised to save his.

My friend Harry was, of course, the highly favoured individual destined to achieve the deliverance of the obdurate Captain, or, his own perdition—the much likelier result—should the Lynch intervention fail.

"There will not be so much danger as you imagine," said Roland, who, I was grieved to see, was fast going Marston-mad, and very anxious to bite me. "Felice has penetrated in disguise into Captain Marston's dungeon,

and left undetected. Then if the enterprise *should* end tragically for us, we know ‘how sleep the brave who’—etcetera.”

“Have the kindness, my friend, to use the objective pronoun singular, not plural. If the enterprise should end tragically—for *me*, not *us*. That is, if you mean ‘us’ to include Robert Sabine. As to how the brave sleep, I should suppose they do so pretty much like other people, that is, if they drop off with their heads on, which would not probably be the case with any foolhardy idiot who seriously attempted to rescue Captain Marston from the iron clutch of Lopez, the guillotine having lately been—I think Madame Elsworthy told us—established *en permanence* in the free and enlightened republic of Paraguay!”

“Your terrible giants, Sabine, exist only in your imagination. Madame Lynch will really manage the matter for a large sum of money, which Elsworthy has agreed to pay; but for her own, not safety exactly, but in compliance with her wish—in fact, her insistence—it is necessary that Captain Marston’s escape should appear to have been accomplished without her knowledge.”

“‘Springs to catch woodcocks,’ Harry. Have nothing to do with the business, let me entreat you. Miss Marston is, I must say, taking very unfair, nay, unscrupulous advantage of her influence over you. Her ‘devoted daughter’ craze, it amounts in its exaggeration to that, is rendering her positively unjust towards others. By-the-bye, Harry,” I added, with not, perhaps, quite justifiable emphasis, but I was determined to keep my impressionable young friend clear of the dangerous enterprise meditated by Miss Marston, “by-the-bye, Harry, what could Ronza—of whom we can make nothing, and Miss Marston will tell us nothing, except that he is an atrocious miscreant—

mean by asking, as he did yesterday during our brief interview, ‘if you were Miss Marston’s lover number two or three?’”

At these words Roland’s eyes flashed with indignant fire, and his lips whitened and trembled with rage. My half random arrow had struck upon a real, if but slight wound, reopening and inflaming it.

“He meant a lie!” exclaimed Roland. “He can utter little else.”

“That may be as a rule, but there was, it seemed to me, a truthful ring in the sneering tone he adopted when speaking the few words I have quoted. And is there, pray let me ask, anything surprising in a young lady of such personal attractions as Miss Marston having more than one admirer? Would there be any harm, answer me frankly, Harry, would any wrong be done to you, if the lady at this moment smiled, indecisively of course is meant, upon more than one suitor?”

“A diabolical wrong!” impetuously exclaimed Roland, rising from the settee upon which he had been reclining, and making towards the door. “A diabolical wrong! But, no, it is a lie of Ronza’s, a felon-stroke with a poisoned dagger. It failed of the slightest effect,” added Harry, in a passionate tone, much belying his words. “It failed of producing the slightest effect, striking as it did upon adamant—upon adamant!”

“I do not believe it has failed of effect, my oversensitive friend. At the same time, I firmly believe it ought to have so failed. I shall take the liberty of speaking with Ronza upon the subject before he leaves.”

“Do not trouble yourself, Mr. Sabine,” said Harry, as he left the room. “I shall do that myself never fear, a very few minutes after the scoundrel is free, and no longer

a prisoner. Miss Marston requires no other vindicator of her honour than myself."

"*Mister Sabine!*" "Miss Marston requires no other vindicator of her honour than himself!" Here was a pretty kettle of fish! Who would for a moment have thought—

The door reopened. "Forgive any little temper, Bob, I may have shown just now," said Harry. "I am a little troubled, vexed in mind, a passing cloud. I have come back to say the foreign post from Rio has just ridden into the yard. If there are letters for you, shall I direct them to be brought here?"

"Do ; and quickly as possible."

Letters from England—letters from home! Magical words, transporting me in a flash of time over the thousands of miles of sea I had traversed since I left England. Home ! I was immediately in presence of the old familiar faces ; of my father, brother, of *her*, who had risen star-like upon the horizon of my youth, elevating it at once to dignity and true manliness. "Come in!"

Two letters from home ! Letters edged and sealed with black ! Death letters ! I recognised the two hand-writings though the characters swam before my eyes. One was the Squire's ; the other *hers* ! I needed not to read either to know that my brother Alfred was dead ! My poor father !

I had not broken the seals when Roland returned. All his asperity was gone. He seated himself by my side, his voice was gentle and low as a woman's, and his eyes were suffused with tears. He and Alf had been close friends.

"I, too, have received letters from home," said Harry. "Alfred died calmly as a child falls asleep. He had broken

a blood-vessel a few hours previously. Your father was unfortunately absent in Leicestershire. Miss Sinclair was with your brother ; he sent for her, and almost his last words blessed you both. Do not read your letters till the morning," added Harry, after pressing a glass of wine upon me, "you will be more composed then. Will you promise me *not* to read them to-night ?"

"I promise, yet why wish me to do so ? There can be no other death news to afflict me. Emilie has written, my father has written, though *his* hand, I now perceive, is less firm than it was wont to be. That is not surprising. Do your letters speak of any other occurrence that it might give me pain to hear ?"

"Your father's letter," said Roland, not answering my question, though I scarcely noticed that at the moment, "was not written till three or four weeks after Alf's death. The mail is a steam packet, as you know, and made the passage in less than half the time consumed by *The Dolphin*."

"That would of course be the case."

"Exactly. Have you a relative of the name of Conway?" added Harry, after a pause, "a gentleman about fifty years of age. I never before heard of him."

"I have never seen though *I have* heard of him often enough. He was our mother's brother, her half brother, that is, the same father only. He succeeded, at his and her father's death, in upsetting a will, by which she was fairly provided for—fairly only. He himself took everything he could take as heir-at-law. That, however, was of no consequence as his sister was engaged to my father ; and he was not the man to break with the woman he loved, because her brother was an unprincipled, covetous, curmudgeon, Conway never visited us, never to my

knowledge spoke with his half-sister after her marriage. He had a place in Leicestershire. What of him ? ”

“ Your father must then have been at his place in Leicestershire when tidings of Alfred’s death reached him. Mr. Conway arrived with him at Ailsa Lodge, and now resides permanently there.”

“ Can that be possible ? And Miss Sinclair ! How ! I must read my letters at once.”

“ Perhaps it will be best to do so, I am a poor hand at keeping any matter dark. I will leave you for half an hour. After that we can talk together.”

I read my father’s letter first. What do I say ? It was *not* my father’s letter, though his hand had traced the characters. Except in episodical outbursts, as it were, of passionate regret for Alfred’s death, and of the old fatherly love and tenderness for me, the spirit that breathed through it was specious Mr. Conway’s.

Emilie, whose gentle presence had soothed my brother’s last moments, who had received his last sigh and blessing, was no longer permitted to visit at Ailsa Lodge ! The Squire, whilst alleging nothing against her, except her half-foreign extraction, vehemently enjoined me to break off the engagement. Money recompense to the girl-widow would be lavishly given ; and that, Mr. Conway broadly hinted, was all the artful lady required. At all events, I was held to my promise upon honour, not to return till I was twenty-one, if I could not before conquer my infatuation. Time might restore me to my senses. If I would break off the engagement, my father would rejoice at my instant embarkation for England.

A postscript in Conway’s not my father’s hand, I was glad of that, intimated that Madame Saint Clair was no doubt a Papist at heart.

A second postscript, written by the Squire, apprised me that my uncle Conway, and cousin, Alice Conway, one of the most charming, sweet-tempered, affectionate persons he had ever known, and who, with my mother's brother, would reside at Ailsa Lodge, at all events till my return, sent me their kindest regards.

As I read, my eyes filled, my heart swelled with conflicting emotions of indignation, rage, pity, regret, a hurricane of passion swept through me, silencing for a time the brother's death-knell tolling through my whole frame of being. But for the reverence I felt for the dear old hand, though guided by such a specious, self-seeking man as I knew Conway to be, I should have torn the letter to shreds, and consigned it to the flames.

With a mighty effort I calmed myself. I had still to read Emilie's letter. By prying into before I opened it, I knew it was a long, closely-written letter. Angry letters, especially from lady to lover, were, I reflected, never long. That was a circumstance of good omen. Emilie did not then, I might presume, visit the slights, the insults she must have endured from my misguided father, from that snake in the grass, Conway, and that charming, sweet-tempered, affectionate daughter of his, upon *my* head.

I broke the seal and read, read, read, again and again, devouring the precious words.

Kind, affectionate, yet every sentence bearing the impress of womanly dignity—here sad, tender as a psalm when touching lightly, soothingly as possible, upon the indignities she had been exposed to, or speaking of my brother's death, of his last words ; anon joyous as a canticle when a sun-ray, projected from behind the cloud-curtain of the present fell with prophetic light upon the future.

If I had changed my mind, should ever change my mind, nay, did my love for her grow comparatively cold, show symptoms of probable decline, Emilie, by anticipation released me fully, completely from my engagement. She herself had often thought as regarded myself, that engagement was premature, and whatever pain it might cause her, no thought of blame would attach to me, if I should, in accordance with my father's wishes, at once break off our correspondence. A few words briefly but distinctly intimated that the five hundred a-year settled upon her by my father would not be received till I confirmed the gift, when legally entitled to do so. "Rich gifts wax poor," it was added in quotation from Ophelia, "when givers prove unkind."

And this was the wife I was to renounce for an unknown Alice Conway, the daughter of a ——. Well, the young woman did not choose her father.

I have given but a slight sketch of that, to me, sacred love, or rather wife-letter; it seemed to echo my dying brother's blessing on our union, and its calming, irradiating effect upon my troubled, darkened spirit was magical. The tumult of the soul was stilled; succeeded by an ineffable sense of peace and gladness. Just as in the material world, after a summer storm the air feels clearer, brighter, more ethereal, the nodding flowers smile with gayer courtesy, the lilies look more lustrously beautiful, the rose blushes with a diviner glow, and the hawthorn gives forth more delicious fragrance. But that death was in the world, that peace and gladness would have had no shadow.

Roland returned as he had promised. I gave him both letters to read.

"This," said he, "I quite agree with you, is Mr.

Conway's, not the Squire's, letter. There is not the faintest ring of his fine old English gentleman's tone in it. Quite evidently, too, Mr. Conway does not at all understand the headstrong, restive spirit of the young gentleman he vicariously addresses. Yet your father does thoroughly ; a proof that the Conways must have obtained great influence over him, and in a very short time too.

"What do I say to this letter from the divine '*Portrait charmant*,' the beautiful, the inexpressive she ? Well, my friend, to be candid, its true significance must depend upon the light in which it is read. Forty-eight hours ago, I should, if in your place, have interpreted it in the same delighted, unquestioning spirit that you quite evidently have. I seem," he added, with sad seriousness, "to be many years older, more mature in the common vice of age, suspicion, distrust, especially of woman's wiles, than I then was. Mere bilious depression perhaps. God knows."

"You break off quickly, Harry. The current of your thoughts has suddenly turned awry, and I need not be told in what direction. That cloud will, I cannot doubt, soon pass away. But pray tell me what you meant by saying the significance of this letter depends upon the light it is read in. That, to a certain extent, is true of all letters, and—"

"I mean this, and only this," interrupted Roland. "The letter is just such a letter as a true-hearted, high-minded lady would write to an affianced suitor, whom she really esteemed and had a strong affection for ; and just such a letter, too, as a very clever woman would write, who knew most thoroughly the enthusiastie gentleman with six thousand a-year, and no end of 'personals,'

whom she was addressing, though she valued his alliance only for the social position it would give her. That is my, perhaps, too-bluntly-stated opinion ; choose which hypothesis you will. There is perhaps some truth in both. You see I am not quite myself just now," he added ; "not the Harry Roland I was a few hours since, and hope very soon to be again. Don't look so glum, Robert. Your thoughts need not take the nightly colour which at this moment clouds mine. I must away. Good night !"

Very certainly he was not the Harry Roland of but a few hours since. The change was marvellous. Some perilous Marston mischief was afoot ; there could be no doubt of that. As to his hypothetical reading of Emilie's letter, that was a mere emanation of jaundiced irritability, nothing more. It would pass off with his own peculiar dismals, which, I hoped, might be equally baseless, visionary.

Señor Martinez came in. He was a quiet, good sort of person, who had a very decided objection to being put out of his accustomed jog-trot course of life. And this Marston-Ronza business *had* put him dreadfully out. But for his respect and esteem for Señor Elsworthy, the estimable proprietor of one of the wealthiest establishments at Rio, he would never have meddled with the troublesome, perplexing affair. Not he !

"This Ronza," Señor Martinez went on, growlingly, "who, between ourselves, I believe to be an utter scamp, an unprincipled adventurer, threatens to sue me in ruinous damages for illegal confinement. What can I say ? Señora Marston begs me to lock him up. She is the friend of Madame Elsworthy, who wrote to request me to serve her in every way I could. Very well, I do so ; and now Señora Marston won't say *why* she wanted him locked

up, and I receive a letter by this day's post from Madame Elsworthy, which tells me the best thing I can do is to apologise, make the fellow a handsome present, and get rid of him. Do you reflect, Señor Inglese," the irate sugar-grower added, glaring emphatically at me through his spectacles, "that this is an infernally complicated, most uncommercial, distracting piece of business?"

I admitted it was, but suggested that it was quite natural the Señora Marston should be exasperated by Ronza's, no doubt, outrageous behaviour to her——

"Outrageous, yes, perhaps!" interrupted Martinez; "but why then does she refuse to give him in charge to Justice, so that I may wash my hands of the fellow? As to the Marston imbroglio, which I don't understand, and don't wish to, I shall, for the future, keep clear of that, and of them. By Saint Jago, I will. They are an unlucky family. The father is under sentence of death, the daughter half crazy, and making others the same, or worse; the son is a proscribed fugitive."

"The son! I thought the Señora Marston was an only child!"

"Oh no, there is a son; a wild young fellow, I believe, for whose capture a heavy reward is offered by Lopez. The young lady, I notice, never speaks of him. He escaped to Europe more than a year ago, and will not, we may be sure, return till Lopez himself has made his exit from the world, which he, a pigmy Napoleon, is doing his little best to devastate and ruin! Sancta Maria, if I had but my will of that fellow!"

"We have not seen much of this terrible war as yet," I remarked.

"I suppose not," said Martinez. "It is chiefly, as yet, carried on by burning corn, cane, tobacco-fields, and

plundering open villages, murdering a few stray enemies now and then. The fighting is mostly confined to the *War Gazettes*. However, Señor Inglese," continued Martinez, "that is not our immediate business. I pack off Ronza soon after dawn to-morrow. Have you anything to propose? Do you wish to see him? Your young countryman has, I hear, arranged to meet him at a place about an hour's distance from this."

"Indeed! I am sorry—very sorry to hear that. It is a rash proceeding on my friend's part."

"I think so, too, but I suppose the charming young Señora has something to do with it; and when that is the case, you know, one might as well preach to the winds as counsel discretion to hot-blooded youth! You do not wish to speak with Ronza?"

"No."

"Then, Señor, I will bid you good-night."

CHAPTER VIII.

“ HOIST WITH HIS OWN PETARD !”

I ROSE early the next morning, and had an interview with Felice. I asked how it was that Mademoiselle Marston did not return to Rio, as I understood she had intended to do? Should the diplomatic errand upon which she had left that city prove abortive, Mr. Roland and I should feel honoured by being permitted to escort her.

Usually calm, imperturbable, Felice was, for a few moments, confused by my question, though she quickly regained her quiet Indian impassibility. “ It was quite impossible for her to say how long Mademoiselle Marston would prolong her stay at Señor Martinez’s. A considerable time, she believed. Mademoiselle had important business on hand.”

This would not be very pleasant hearing for much perplexed Señor Martinez. He would, however, be obliged to acquiesce in whatever arrangement Miss Marston, either from caprice or necessity, should resolve upon. He, although a cultivator on a large scale, and owner of a numerous stock of slaves, being, it had incidentally become known to me, under heavy money liabilities to the great English house at Rio. It behoved him, therefore, not to offend Madame Elsworthy.

There could, however, be no motive, except a sentimental one on Roland’s part, for our remaining at the plantation, and I was very anxious, for his sake, to get away quickly. I had a strong presentiment that mischief

—perilous mischief—was brewing, the chief agents in its preparation being Ellen Marston and Felipe Ronza, both acting to one end—the destruction of my friend; the first, unconsciously, in purest innocence of heart, the other, with diabolic *malice prepense*. I would see Harry at once, and have some serious converse with him.

This resolve of mine could not be carried into immediate effect. He was not in his bed or bedroom; and upon inquiring of a smart Creole servant girl, I was informed that he had gone out very early.

"I think," added the girl, with a half-saucy smile, "you may find him at the Pavilion. I saw him and Señora Marston not very far from there, half an hour ago. They were walking hurriedly, I thought, as if to avoid notice."

"Señor Rolard and Mademoiselle Marston" (the Creole girl spoke in French), said I, "could not be desirous of avoiding notice. You may possibly have mistaken some other persons for them."

"Oh, Sancta Maria! no," said the girl. "I was at a considerable distance from them, it is true, but who could possibly mistake Mademoiselle Marston for any one else! As to the Señor, your friend, he wore his hat and plume *de fantaisie*; I could not, therefore, be wrong as to him. You will find them, Señor," added the wench, tripping away, "in the Pavilion."

That was likely enough, and I could stroll that way in the hope of meeting Harry before (a point of vital importance) he left to keep his appointment with Ronza, who had gone off on horseback soon after daybreak.

The Pavilion was a fantastical kind of summer-house, erected at about the centre of a large flower garden circled and shaded with orange-trees. Fountains were playing in the midst, and it was altogether a cool, pleas-

ant retreat from the noon-day heat and glare of a South American summer. It was odd, however, that the two lovers, if lovers they were, should seek its sequestered shade at that early hour of the morning.

The hat and plume *de fantaisie*, spoken of by the Creole servant, was certainly a fantastic sort of head-gear. I was present when it was purchased at Mr. Elsworth's country-place, a mile or so out of Rio. A travelling pedlar was admitted to display his wares, and amongst them were two hats, somewhat in shape such as Italian bandits sport on the stage in England, looped in front and ornamented with ostrich feathers, fastened by a large Brazilian diamond.

Harry put on one. Miss Marston said it became him remarkably well, and he purchased both, making me, on the spot, a present of one. I, however, having no notion of making a theatrical guy of myself, declined his offer, and the hat was, I thought, left at the place. Harry, since our arrival at the plantation, had almost constantly worn his, which really did become him when familiarity had worn off the strangeness of it. The Creole servant could not consequently have been mistaken as to the identity of the wearer of the plumed, diamond-looped hat.

I walked on without meeting with either the young lady or the young gentleman, but when I neared the open-latticed Pavilion I distinctly heard the voice of Miss Marston speaking in vehement, supplicatory tones, and in the Portuguese tongue.

I drew back, keeping the circling orange-trees between me and the Pavilion. I had not comprehended a word of what the young lady said during the few moments I was within hearing of her voice, but I was much astonished at its *tone*, at once entreative, sad, reproachful ;

there could be no mistake as to that. That emotional utterance, too, was in Portuguese, which Roland, like myself, but imperfectly comprehended, and spoke worse—instead of English, the language in which they always naturally addressed each other.

I heard no other voice than the young lady's. Presently a door of the Pavilion, not visible from where I stood, opened with a burst, and a few minutes afterwards I saw Harry striding off at a violent pace, and already from twenty to thirty yards away. His back was towards me, but there was no mistaking the young gentleman and his plumed hat *de fantaisie*. He carried a rifle, too. That was another odd circumstance.

The clang of the door by which Harry had made his exit was quickly followed by the hasty opening of one nearer to me, and which my eye commanded through a gap in the orange trees. Thence emerged Miss Marston, evidently in great distress of mind. Her features were highly flushed, her flashing eyes suffused with tears. She swept past, not observing me, with hurrying, disordered steps.

What might be the meaning of this strange incident? I could not interpret it in any intelligible fashion, and walked slowly back by the way I came, pondering it in vain; when, just as I had passed the garden gate, who should I see but Harry, hatted, plumed, as I had seen him ten minutes before when going off on foot in an opposite direction, and now galloping towards me on horseback!

I was greatly startled, half imagining I must have lost my senses; so much so, that it required a resolute effort to shout after him to stop. He heard me, turned in the saddle, with a negative wave of his arm declined my

invitation, and sped on. He, too, carried a rifle slung over his shoulder.

No question that the horseman was the true Harry, but who, then, was the other fellow? A secret contraband lover of Miss Marston's, having probably something to do with my friend's, of late, perturbed thoughts concerning “woman's wiles,” his morbid suspicion that the divinity enthroned in his imagination would prove to have nothing of ethereality about her, might unveil herself suddenly, or be unveiled to his disenchanted vision, as a mere mortal—fickle, deceptive, false, as mere mortals are sometimes found to be.

The situation appeared to have no other outlook than that. I recalled to mind the purchase of the two hats *de fantaisie*. Had Miss Marston possessed herself of one of them to more securely carry out some secret, treacherous scheme of her own?

Could such paltry deceit dwell in that gorgeous palace? And what scheme—what treacherous purpose could be furthered by dressing up a more favoured lover as my dear, poor, duped friend's double?

No satisfactory solution could be even guessed at, so I made up my mind to directly question the lady herself, first informing her of what I had witnessed at the Pavilion, and the subsequent galloping past of the real Mr. Harry Roland. Acting on this impulse, I despatched a short note by Felice. In a few minutes she returned.

“Mademoiselle Marston cannot be seen by any one,” said she, not without some asperity of tone and manner, “and she has only to say in reply to your unintelligible note, that you are under a delusion, also that she expects you, as a gentleman, will not play the spy upon her actions.”

Having said that, Miss Felice walked off with much imitative dignity.

I could do nothing, attempt nothing more till Harry's return, so I ordered lunch; and that disposed of, composed myself for a siesta. There was no ceremony at Señor Martinez's. He was a bachelor, generally away from the house during the day attending to the business at his farm or plantation, and returning home to a late dinner.

Spite of such disturbing influences as my poor friend Roland's not, it seemed, ill-grounded jealousy, and apprehension of the peril, his hot temper considered, it might involve him in, and his rash engagement to meet Felipe Ronza, I not only lunched heartily, but had been for a considerable time enjoying a placid, comfortable snooze, when I was suddenly and most rudely awakened.

Harry Roland had burst into the room and almost shaken the very life out of me, before I, fiercely struggling, was fully awake, and knew who it was that had got such violent hold of me.

"Hullo, Harry!" I exclaimed, not a little ruffled both in temper and person. "What's all this about—are you suddenly gone mad?"

"Yes, yes," he gasped, casting himself upon a settee, "mad, mad! You are right, I am mad. Aye, and have ample cause for madness!"

I looked at him. Never had I seen him so excited. Passionate rage flamed through his burning eyes, yet his face was white as stone. He strove to speak on, but fierce emotion choked the words, which he could only spasmodically get through his ashy-pale, quivering lips.

I insisted upon his remaining silent, quiet as possible for a time, or I would not hear a word he had to say. I

next, with some difficulty, persuaded him to take a calming draught of medicated spirits, the efficacy of which we had both before experienced, and the materials for which were at hand.

As I expected, he soon fell asleep ; fitful, not sound sleep, but which had a powerful calming effect. He awoke in about an hour, and poured into my sympathising ear the lamentable story of his wrongs, his blighted hopes, his incurable despair. I shall give it briefly as may be. I especially need not dwell upon his protestations of earnest love—not the straw on fire of boyish fancy, but the red-hot steel of man’s devotion. It was true enough, I could not but admit that both of us were really, whatever baptismal registers might say, *virile*, mature men. We may take it for granted that in his eyes, his imagination, the light of setting suns, the breath of summer flowers, the radiance of the silver stars, were in Ellen Marston concentrated, and combined with a grace and sweetness all her own. I could understand all that perfectly. I had drunk of the same fountain from a like fairy goblet.

Miss Marston had recognised his devotion, and though not professing to return it, not certainly in its sublimised form, acknowledged that she esteemed, thought highly of him, and that when the absorbing aim and duty of her life—the restoration of a beloved father to free life—had been accomplished, she might, other considerations concurring, listen favourably to,—&c.

The magic of young love would require nothing more than such coloured cobweb wherewith to weave enchanted castles in the air, people the illumined palace of the soul with visions of a bright ecstatic future !

Thus matters stood when Felipe Ronza first began to

instil the poison of suspicion and jealousy into my young friend's mind. Things trifling in themselves gave force and significance to Ronza's hints.

"And now, now, two hours ago!" he shouted, screamed, raising himself from the sofa upon which he reclined, "the accursed truth in all its hideousness has been revealed to me—Ellen Marston is a married woman! She espoused one Quintilla at Buenos Ayres more than a twelvemonth ago, not knowing then, not knowing now, that Quintilla was a married man, that his wife is still living in the capital of Paraguay!"

"Go on, my friend, only draw it as mild as possible. You may break a blood-vessel."

Harry glared fiercely at me.

"You don't believe in the truth of what I am saying?"

"I do not. Ellen Marston stoop to such atrocious deceit? Tut. It is an invention of Ronza's, and weak, absurd, as it is malignant."

"I tell you it is *true*," raved Harry, "and Quintilla, Ronza's spies have informed him, has even lately had private assignations with her, very early in the day or late in the evening! The better to avoid the notice, which as a stranger he would attract, he is disguised in dress so as to be, at a distance, taken for me. She has even procured for him one of the plumed looped hats I bought at my cousin's country place, and which was, I suppose, left there. Ha! that circumstance appears to strike you somewhat forcibly; but I have proof positive of Ellen Marston's duplicity. Look at this," added Roland, placing in my hand the torn off half of a sheet of note paper.

"Read it, you know her hand, and if not, you do mine. The love message to Quintilla is written upon the torn off half of a note which I addressed to her. She has

merely drawn the pen through the two or three concluding lines of my note. The impatient lady,” added Harry, bitterly, “ must have been short of note paper. Read.”

“ MY DEAREST EDWARD,

“ I will meet you at the Pavilion early to-morrow morning. Let me beseech you not, for any consideration, to delay your preparations for our secret flight. You are dilatory, procrastinating—dally, cruelly I may say, with ruin, death ! You are also supremely unjust. How could you for one moment imagine, as Felice says you do, that my ‘ chivalrous young lover,’ as you spitefully, yet with perfect truth, call him, has acquired such an ascendancy as to make me for a moment forgetful of you ? Utterly absurd, Edward, to imagine that the sacred bond which unites us could be weakened by such a feeling. I greatly esteem Harry Roland ; know he is devoted to me ; and only wish I could hit upon some plausible excuse for communicating with you through him. But that is impossible. With all his frank simplicity of character, he possesses keen perception. He could not be hoodwinked. Be prepared, I again beg of you. My mind is full of dark fancies, gloomy forebodings. Adieu for the present, beloved Edward.

“ Your ever affectionate

“ ELLEN.”

I was shocked, staggered. And yet it seemed utterly impossible to believe Ellen Marston could be guilty of such turpitude. Surely there must be some explanation possible. But what explanation ? “ How came Ronza in possession of this writing ? ” I asked.

“ Some of Ronza’s people have bribed Quintilla’s servant

or slave—a negro—who has access to his master's papers. But Quintilla trusts him very partially. He cannot even discover when the secret flight of Miss Marston and Quintilla is to take place, nor where is the place of rendezvous. That I have undertaken to find out."

" You have undertaken to co-operate with Ronza?"

" Why not? Quintilla owes Ronza a large sum, a very large sum of money, which he is able to pay, but evades the obligation. Ronza, if he can find Quintilla, will have him arrested by a civil officer who is near at hand for that purpose. The scoundrel intends leaving Brazil for the United States with his pretended wife, the unhappy betrayed Ellen Marston. We shall spoil that pretty game, and the unfortunate lady will be at least relieved from degrading thraldom, ignoble, shameful bondage. You are still incredulous? Remain so. Time proves all things. Let us speak no more at present upon the subject."

" Yes, one word more, if you please. How do you propose to discover the hour fixed for secret flight—the place of rendezvous!"

" There are means," replied Roland, " of placing me in communication with Quintilla. He will confide in, trust me."

" I understand. You have, I suppose, promised to keep this charming little plot a profound secret!"

" What do you mean by plot? It is simply a plan to entrap and punish an atrocious scoundrel. To rescue Ellen Marston, who, I need not add, can be henceforth nothing to me, from utter destruction, from a life of—for a time unconscious, but not less real—infamy. It is, I insist, a commendable, nay, if you better prefer the phrase, a chivalrous act on my part, grossly deceived, mocked as I have been. It is true," added Harry, " that

I gave my word of honour not to mention the matter to Martinez. And, by Jove, now I think of it, you, Robert, were included in that pledge ! It is no great matter. You would not interfere if you could to prevent the unmasking of a villain, nor counterplot to ensure the life-ruin of Ellen Marston.”

“ You may be quite sure of that, my friend. I should like, however, to know the time of flight,” I added, “ the place of rendezvous. I pledge you my word, that if Ronza’s story is true, I will not attempt to balk him. Not I. At the same time, I should like to take some precaution against the possibility, to put it mildly, of Ronza’s playing *you* false.”

“ There is no fear of that. I will tell you directly I know myself. Good-bye, I am quite well now.”

“ Quite well now,” I mentally ejaculated. “ Ah, my poor friend, you deceive yourself. The poisoned arrow has penetrated to your being’s innermost depths, and if I know Harry Roland, not poppy nor mandragora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world will ever medicine him to the sweet sleep which he owned but yesterday, unless Ellen Marston be again enthroned in his heart in all her purity and brightness ? And it is strongly borne in on my mind that she will be so. Yet upon what basis can I ground that opinion, that hope rather ? It may be that sceptical optimism as regards the lady, blinds, misleads my judgment as much, if not more, than jealous credulity does Roland’s.”

At all events, I would see and confer with Señor Martinez.

Late the next day Harry furnished me confidentially in writing—he declined an interview—with the place of rendezvous, the time agreed upon for flight.

The place of meeting was a partially dilapidated barn upon Martinez's estate, and distant from his house about three miles. Ellen Marston with Felice would meet Quintilla there at ten o'clock precisely that evening.

The house-clock had chimed half-past eight, Harry had left for the rendezvous, and we, Señor Martinez and I, knew that Miss Marston and Felice were, unknown as they believed to any one in the house, making quiet preparation to be off. Felice, who had the ruling of the establishment so to speak, had already saddled two horses.

Señor Martinez came into the room, fully equipped for the enterprise—that is, he was armed with a rifle, and had two revolvers in his belt, concealed by his short cloak.

"It is nearly time to be starting," said the Señor, "for of course we must walk. The night is dark, though there is a faint starlight. We have time enough," he added, "for another tumbler of rum punch. By Nossa Señora da Gloria," he added, seating himself, "I don't half like the business. Still, as you say, it must be gone through with. Madame Elsworthy would never forgive us if, through our heedlessness, her dear friend Ellen Marston were carried off by such a fellow as this Quintilla appears to be."

"Or by Felipe Ronza," said I; "that in my thought will be the real game to be played after Quintilla is disposed of—and—and my rash self-willed young friend Roland is—is—" I could hardly get the word out, hanging as it did on the fever-beatings of my heart, "and my rash, self-willed young friend Roland is—is murdered."

"That, my good Señor Ingles, we shall be sure to be able to guard against; and I trust, for the unfortunate young lady's sake, that Ronza will be able to prove what

he says against Quintilla, if it be true. Ah, Señor!” said Martinez, with more of sentiment than I had imagined could pulsate in that fat, oily body of his, “ah, Señor, to think that such a bright star should have fallen from heaven?”

“Sad, indeed, if it be true. Your men are all at their post?”

“Oh, yes. They reached the old barn singly, and were, they believe, observed by no one. There are thirty-one stout, reliable fellows—I chose them myself—and well armed. The floor of the barn is, I must tell you, divided by a partition. In the smallest compartment our men are stowed away. We shall be able to see very well, through the chinks, what is going on, whilst being in total darkness, they will not be able to glimpse us.”

“Well, here’s fortune, and I will hope the last act of our little domestic drama will be the final scene of a happily ending farce-comedy. At all events, we shall be too much for Felipe Ronza, whatever may be his game.”

“That is true; now, then, let us be gone.”

A fire had been kindled in the barn, the night being damp and chilly, and a lamp stood upon a table, near which sat Roland, and, I doubted not, Quintilla—a fine, soldierly-looking, youngish man, with a frank, open expression of countenance, not in the least indicative of such a scoundrel as Ronza accused him of being.

Roland, his arms folded, wrapt up in his cloak, looked gloom, and thunder, and eclipse, not once speaking to his companion. That was natural enough. The treacherous negro-slave kept himself well back in shadow.

There was wine upon the table, of which Quintilla alone partook, and freely. He was evidently much agitated.

At last the sound of horses' feet struck simultaneously upon their ears and ours. Roland and Quintilla started to their feet, and the black came forward to unfasten the barn-gate. We softly withdrew the bolts of the door in the partition, through which we should suddenly pounce upon the unexpectant company.

"It is Ellen!" exclaimed Quintilla, with a congratulatory glance at Roland (what on earth bamboozlement sort of a story, it gleamed across my mind, can Harry have pitched to this Quintilla?) "It is Ellen!"

The congratulatory glance was responded to by as savage a scowl as Harry's face was capable of expressing, as he drew back into shadow, no doubt to witness, unobserved himself, the meeting of Quintilla and Miss Marston.

That gratification was quickly afforded, and a very delightful one it must have been.

The barn-door was flung wide by the black, and in hurried, in a state of much alarm it seemed, Ellen Marston and Felice.

The young lady rushed into Quintilla's outstretched arms, wildly clasping him round the neck.

"Dear—dearest Edward!"

"Beloved, faithful Ellen!"

"Oh heaven!" screamed the young lady, glancing round, "we are betraycd, ruined, lost!"

"Found, you mean, dainty Señora!" exultingly exclaimed Ronza, who with thirteen or fourteen armed ruffians crowded into the barn. "Found, you mean! I have you safe at last! Thanks—thanks," he added,

with ferocious glee, “to this chivalrous lover of yours!” pointing to Roland, who had suddenly stepped forward.

“It cannot be,” said Ellen Marston, “it is impossible that Harry Roland can have betrayed me, betrayed my poor hunted brother into the hands of such ruffians?”

“Your brother!” gasped Roland. “Your brother! No, no, no, I cannot have been such a wretch—such a dupe! You believed yourself to be this Quintilla’s wife; whereas, unhappy lady, you are——”

“His sister—his own sister!” broke in Ronza with a roar of diabolical triumph. “And Quintilla is the Lieutenant Marston for whose capture Lopez, the illustrious President of Paraguay, offers a large, an immense reward. Haven’t I played you all a delightful trick? The splendid reward and the haughty lady—booty and beauty are both mine, mine, mine!”

“Not yet!” exclaimed Harry, drawing a pistol from his belt and firing with rapid aim directly at Ronza’s head. The fellow instinctively turned his head aside, and the bullet grazed his temple only.

“Bind, fetter them all except the lady,” screamed Ronza, made furious by the imminence of the peril he had so narrowly escaped, “and let us to horse? Now, Señora!”

It was our turn to make a few amongst the exulting rascals, and the effect produced by our sudden appearance was really in respect of expressive pantomimic attitudes, quite picturesque. A *coup de theâtre* of the completest, most satisfactory kind, the orchestral accompaniment thereto being screaming, curses, maledictions the awfullest on the part of the baffled ruffians, emphasised by Ellen Marston’s hysterical, yet exultant

laughter, and a Caribbean burst of triumph, hurled forth by Felice, almost appalling in its intensity.

"You see, Felipe Ronza," said I, "that the play was not over when you imagined it to be. It is you, I am thinking, that will have to be fettered."

"Yes," said Señor Martinez, "and well flogged too. Strip the fellow," added the Señor, addressing two powerful blacks, "and bull-hide him till he howls again. You heard him say he was an agent of that villain, President Lopez, and seeking to carry off people from Brazilian territory. Never mind his howling. To-morrow if t'were not too much trouble, I'd have packed him off to a Rio jail."

"And now, Señora, Señors," added Martinez, "this little affair comfortably settled we had better, I think, be going homewards. The affair seems to have given me a sharp appetite for supper. Let the rascals go," he said, in reply to one of his head men. "I'll not be pestered with them; but if they dare intrude upon my property again, I'll have them flogged within an ace of their lives."

"Señor Martinez," said Ellen Marston in a low voice, "I and my brother must leave for Buenos Ayres at dawn to-morrow."

"So you shall, and by San Jago with all my heart. Why did you intend to leave true, honest friends by stealth, Señora? I cannot understand that."

"You shall know all some day, Señor Martinez," said Miss Marston; "when you do, when that is the case, you will commend our present reserve. I shall take care," added the lady, "to inform Madame Elsworthy how more than kind you have been to me. She shall be grateful to you for that."

“She is an excellent lady,” said Señor Martinez. “Please to assure her I have felt much pleasure at being able to assist her charming friend out of a rather serious scrape.”

“I shall gladly do so. If—if,” added Miss Marston, “if any inquiry should be made of you respecting my brother, Lieutenant Marston, we can rely upon your discretion?”

“Certainly you may. How do I know the young man here is Lieutenant Marston! That rascal Ronza may have said so, but who is bound to believe what such a fellow says? Do I know where you are going? To Buenos Ayres, to Rio, or New York, or Japan? Not I. I shall only be sure you are not in my house.”

“Thank you, Señor Martinez. Mr. Roland,” added the lady in English, exquisitely dulcet, yet keenly-thrilling English, Harry by his sudden start must have felt it to be, “Mr. Roland, ride nearer to me. I want to talk with you.”

CHAPTER IX.

ACROSS THE PAMPAS.

AN agreeable surprise awaited us at the house of our very hospitable, if somewhat fidgety, host. Our old friend, Dr. Kirwan, the surgeon of *The Dolphin*, had arrived during our brief absence.

We were heartily glad to see him. He brought important business documents from Mr. Elsworthy for Señor Martinez. These would require to be signed by that gentleman, and the execution to be duly witnessed.

That being the case, and the Doctor, for the time disengaged, and desirous of change of scene and occupation, had accepted the commission. To fulfil it would occupy but an hour or so on the morrow, and the documents would be returned to Rio by the next post.

The Doctor was not, we soon found, indisposed to "adventurise" with us, as he termed it, for a short time, if we did not object, and our "adventurising"—an important point—was not likely to be too dangerously venturesome, risky. Our Surgeon had a taste for botany, and was desirous of a more intimate acquaintance with the flora of the South American wilderness. With its zoology he was already, as we knew, quite sufficiently familiar.

That matter was easily arranged. It had been settled during the brief ride back from the barn, that Roland and I should escort Miss Marston to Buenos Ayres. Harry

would go, and I could not abandon the harum-scarum mad-cap, especially whilst the love craze was so strong upon him.

Dr. Kirwan said he should be pleased to pay a visit to Buenos Ayres. Monte Video, on the opposite bank of the La Plata River, he was very well acquainted with.

"You will have to traverse one of the Pampas," remarked Martinez, "lying between this and Buenos Ayres—not the most extensive of those wide stretching plains, one of which they tell us is about a thousand of your English miles from north to south, but, *Madre de Dios*, this comparatively tiny one which you will have to pass over, is at least two hundred miles in a direct line to Buenos Ayres! Mostly barren, desolate wastes," added Martinez.

"In some parts only," said Lieutenant Marston. "There is an enormous extent of wild clover, and in summer I have ridden many miles through thistles growing ten or twelve feet high. Innumerable cattle are bred upon the Pampas. The herdsmen, as you are aware, no doubt, are Guacho Indians—a very inferior race, whose food consists chiefly of roasted horseflesh."

"They are not at all a ferocious race, I have heard," remarked the Doctor. "A lone unarmed traveller would have nothing to fear from them."

"That is more than I should like to answer for," said Marston. "Still the real peril to be encountered in traversing those vast, unpeopled tracts is the Pampero hurricane."

"I have heard so. It is a kind of sirocco, is it not?" said Kirwan.

"It is a hurricane blast of scorching wind, which rises suddenly, and withers up everything over which it sweeps.

Men, horses, mules, have been struck down by its fiery breath, as if smitten by lightning."

"A Pampero of that intensity," said Martinez, "is rare, very rare. I have often heard people talk of other people having been exposed to such visitations, but never one person who had himself actually witnessed such a Pampero as you describe. It is somewhat of a hobgoblin tale, I fancy," added the Señor, who, though as I have said one of the most hospitable of men in a country where a lavish—one might say a reckless—hospitality is a matter of course, was very anxious that his present guests should not be frightened into indefinitely prolonging their obliging visit.

"Any one that happened to be actually exposed to such a Pampero," said Lieutenant Marston, "would not be likely—dead men do not tell even hobgoblin tales—to relate the story. It is, no doubt, a rare, exceedingly rare occurrence, but that it is not an imaginative, nor an exaggerated phenomenon, I can testify from ocular experience. The summer before last," continued the Lieutenant, "I with some twelve or thirteen companions were traversing the very Pampas which we shall begin crossing tomorrow.

"Ours had been a purely commercial expedition, and we were returning to Buenos Ayres, well satisfied with the business transacted. We had incidently heard from some Guachos that a hurricane of fire had swept over a portion of the vast plain, about a month previously, but we had put it down, like Señor Martinez, as a grossly exaggerated story, if not a pure invention.

"Our incredulity was signally rebuked. At sunrise, on the third day of our journey homeward, we came suddenly upon a long, low, irregular line upwards of a

mile certainly in extent, of the skeletons of horses, mules, and among them some dozen Guacho Indians that all had been struck down by the fiery pestilence !

“ Hundreds of vultures—the hawk vulture species—whom our appearance did not at all disturb, were perched upon the skeletons, picking the already well picked bones. Death, from the position of the skeletons, must have been almost instantaneous. The mouth of one more than ordinarily large human skeleton was, I noticed, wide open, and filled with sand ; the fiery blast having done its work, the pure cool morning breeze was laughing through his ribs ; his legs suddenly stiffened by death, had been striking wildly in the air. It was a sickening, fearful sight.”

“ That is very true,” said Miss Marston, as she rose to retire for the night, “ and I wish, Edward, you had not favoured us with the description. I imagined the only peril we should have to encounter in our brief Pampas journey, would be due to the persevering malignity of the villain Ronza. Oh, Dr. Kirwan—well remembered—your old friend, Romero, he you were entering into a joint-stock speculation with at Rio, and who afterwards robbed, and tried to murder you, is one of Ronza’s filibustering band ! ”

“ Romero ! Are you quite sure of that ? ”

“ Perfectly sure. You must have noticed,” the lady added, speaking to Roland, “ the tall fellow who acts as a sort of second in command ? Of course you did. That man, Dr. Kirwan, was Romero, I had often seen him in Rio. Good-night, gentlemen. We must be up before the sun to-morrow.”

The Doctor seemed to be rather put out by Miss Marston’s announcement that Señor Romero was in the neigh-

bourhood, and would probably be on his, the Surgeon's track, and in the unpleasant character too of a filibuster, outlaw, highwayman. It probably occurred to the worthy gentleman that his little "adventurising" freak was opening up rather ominously.

Morn rose in beauty, freshness of beauty. There was a pleasant air stirring, and our party set forth in highest spirits.

Considerably before noon we halted for refreshment, repose, and shade, choosing for that purpose a small ruined building that had, we were told by Lieutenant Marston, been, some eighty or ninety years before, the abode of a pious recluse, famous for his austerity and correlative holiness.

"It must have been a structure," I observed, "of some mark." The stones had been carefully selected, smoothly wrought. "But," said I, "you surely overrate the antiquity of these ruins. Eighty or ninety years! Why there is not a touch of age, of venerableness, about these polished blocks. They look as if newly quarried."

"Ah, you are mentally contrasting them," said Lieutenant Marston, "with English ruins. They are utterly unlike. There can be no venerableness attachable in idea to the ruins you witness in hot glaring countries. In England—I was several years in the grand old land—nature seems to cast nothing utterly off. The very stones quarried from her bosom, when they have fulfilled the purpose for which they were fashioned—often before—she takes again to herself, hides their decay by soft mosses, clinging ivy; they are hers again, clasped lovingly in her sheltering arms. In these countries she abandons them for ever to the pelting storm, the bare, glaring sunshine, disdaining—"

"Who comes here?" exclaimed Miss Marston interrupting her brother. The swift gallop of a horse coming from the direction we had been pursuing, had caught her ear.

In a minute or two, the horseman was abreast the ruins, had caught sight of us—reined up suddenly, glared in our faces, then dug the spurs into his horse's flanks, and gone off at fullest speed.

"That man," exclaimed the Doctor, glancing round at us with a far from gratified expression, "that man is Señor Romero!"

"Meeting at the outset of a journey through these melancholy wastes with such a daring ruffian as Romero," remarked the Doctor, observing that none of us seemed much impressed by the height and stare of the passing horseman, "is an evil omen. A Roman would turn back."

"Then a Roman," said Roland, "would be an egregious ass! Let us press onwards with such speed as the mules can keep pace with. These melancholy wastes, Lieutenant Marston tells me," added Harry, "are not unpeopled—clusters of huts, Guacho villages, dot them here and there."

"That is quite true," said Marston, "and we shall reach one before nightfall if we use due diligence. We had better be moving at once, especially," he added, his eye anxiously directed towards the western horizon, "especially as I fancy—experience has not given me the right to speak with confidence—that there are signs to windward of the getting up of a sand-storm?"

"Of a sand-storm!" exclaimed Miss Marston. "What for mercy's sake is a sand-storm?"

"Not so terrible, in idea," said Lieutenant Marston, "as a fire-storm, though sometimes as fatal in effect.

We must push on, for however quickly we proceed, our route for the next two hours at least lies across a sterile tract of loose, sandy soil."

"I once witnessed," said Dr. Kirwan as soon as we were off again, "I once witnessed a sand-storm in Arabia Petræa; and but for a shift of wind, I and the party with me, would have been entombed, as hundreds have been, in a sand-sepulchre. But I had no idea that such a fearful phenomenon was one of the perils of the South American Pampas."

"A sand, like a fire-storm or Pampero—the name applies to both—very rarely occurs, I believe, but, like that, is a terrible reality. Quite nine-tenths of the Pampas plains are covered with a strong, rank vegetation, and it is only in such a barren waste as we are now traversing, that a sand-storm can spring up."

"In the sand-storm by which I was nearly engulfed," said Dr. Kirwan, "the sand was drawn up by the whirlpool wind, so to speak, into spiral columns, and as we were between them and the declining sun, they had the appearance of moving pillars of fire. There is certainly nothing of the kind to be seen here."

"No," said the Lieutenant, "the sands of the Pampas do not rise in columns. At least I have not heard that they ever do. They take the form of waves. A sand-sea, is, in fact, winds driven in eddying billows over the flat surface of the plain. You would take it, I am told, to be really an agitated yellow sea breaking upon a level shore, and coming on us with a flood tide. Do you see nothing, happily far to windward, resembling or indicating such a phenomenon?"

Thus instructed, we all did observe in the far distance appearances which indicated the rising of such a sand

flood, as the Lieutenant described, and instinctively both whip and spur were had recourse to.

"There is no great occasion for alarm, Ellen," said the brother, "and in such a journey as this, great haste means less speed. At a moderate pace, unless the wind shall rise to tempest-force, we shall soon have left all danger behind!"

Fortunately the wind, instead of rising, gradually fell, and in less than half an hour the sand-billows were no longer visible even through a telescope.

"In the deserts of Arabia," remarked the Doctor, "there are Oases, green well-watered spots of grassy shade, planted it seems by Divine compassion in the sterile desert for the sustenance and solace of the worn wayfarer. Is it the same in these wastes?"

"Well, in a certain sense, yes, but with this great difference, that in the Oases of the Pampas, the worn wayfarer, if not quite as wary as he may be weary, would probably afford solace and sustenance to the inhabitants, whose assigned and native dwelling place the Oases of the South American plains have been since their creation."

"You mean, of course," I remarked, "the miniature forests, which, as I have read, in a very few places break the monotony of the Pampas."

"Yes, and one, the largest, we shall be passing in about two hours. A mass, several miles in length and breadth, of gigantic trees with magnificent foliage, matted undergrowth, and teeming, I have been told, with four-footed and reptile life in all its South American varieties. The Guacho Indians hunt there sometimes for pecarries, monkeys, parrots. They also gather their palm-berries, of which they make a kind of wine."

"I have often drunk palm-wine," said the Doctor, "but

it is only a peculiar species of the palm which yields the necessary fruit. It must now be the blossoming season, and I should like to obtain a few specimens."

"Do not let botanical research, my dear sir," said the Lieutenant, "carry you too far into those blossoming coverts. The forest we are now approaching has an ill-name, especially for boas, which attain, they say, to as magnificent proportion—especially in size of swallow—as the boas of Ceylon.

"There are some queer boa and beast stories told of these Oases of the Pampas, one of which I will relate for the warning of our excellent friend, the Doctor, lest his botanic enthusiasm should bring him to the sad fate which befel the hero of the tale.

"A cavalry officer in the Argentine service, who had halted his men on the verge of the forest one sultry noon, sat down to rest and refresh himself directly beneath the shadowing branches of a huge tree.

"There lay coiled a watchful boa, which, as the unsuspecting man was raising a measure of wine to his lips, circled his ample body in its eager enfolding embrace, and whipped him into the tree in a trice, amidst the magnificent foliage of which he, wildly screaming, immediately disappeared. It was full two hours afterwards that the gallant captain was found in shockingly intimate association with the carnivorous serpent, which had selected a dank, grassy hollow as a quiet, retired dining-room.

"The captain had been swallowed, and was in slow process of digestion, metal sheathed sword inclusive, up to his pedal extremities, which were found still sticking out of the monster's voracious gullet, the large cavalry spurs having, perhaps, prevented the boa from satisfactorily completing his dinner. Serpent and soldier, but this

part of the story I cannot personally vouch for, were conveyed, in the exact state they were found in, to Buenos Ayres, and are there preserved in spirits, for the delectation of the curious in zoological and natural history."

"Don't pay attention to Edward's absurd stories, Dr. Kirwan," said Miss Marston. "I don't believe there are any dangerous animals in those isolated woods. They are frequently visited, I know, by Guacho Indians in search of particular plants which possess especially healing properties. If you have time, Doctor, you may botanise in those splendid floral coverts in perfect safety, take my word for it!"

The Lieutenant laughed, another topic was started, and about two hours had passed pleasantly away when we found ourselves in the immediate vicinity of the talked-of forest, where a halt was called.

A forest it really was, though rendered insignificant in appearance by the immense void, the apparently unbounded vastness, by which it was circled, an altogether incongruous, out of place position to occupy it seemed; and I almost fancied the tall, thickly clustering palms, as constrained by the again rising wind they inclined their lofty heads towards each other, must be commenting upon, and wondering what the strangers thought, of finding them in such a place.

It was about three o'clock, and the negroes at once pitched the tent provided by Señor Martinez for Madame Elsworthy's *protégée* and her attendant, but large enough to give us all dining room.

Dr. Kirwan, confiding in Miss Marston's assurance that there was no real peril of four-footed beasts or venomous reptiles to be encountered, and attracted by the luxuriant, many coloured foliage, left us sipping our wine

in dreamy repose, to possess himself of a few rare specimens.

He was gone a long time, how long I did not know, when roused from slumber to resume our journey. Roland, the Lieutenant, and the darkies were shouting at the top of their voices, to hasten the Doctor's return, and it was plain that even Miss Marston, who had denied so confidently that the comparatively tiny forests of the Pampas were infested with dangerous wild animals, was looking anxious.

The shouting of the men, the emulative barking of the dogs, proved of no avail, no Doctor made his appearance, and I, Harry, and the Lieutenant, entered the wood together in search of him, Felicee, at Miss Marston's request, doing the same, but at some distance from us.

The Doctor was nowhere to be seen, and we were at a loss how to proceed, when Felicee hurried up to us, and speaking in a low tone, and with a kind of terrified merriment, said,

"I have found the Doctor. He is not devoured yet, but you must make haste. He is in prison," the girl added, "and will leave it too soon, if we are not quick. Come, and tread softly."

It was no jest of the girl's. The worthy gentleman was in prison, his jailors being four enormous jaguars.

It happened this wise : the Doctor discovered a eactus in full bloom growing upon the trunk of a huge mimosa. He clambered a considerable distance up the tree, and had just plucked a bunch of blossoms, when he was transfixed, turned to statuesque stone, by a new Gorgon—a four-fold Gorgon.

Lightly as he placed his foot upon a branch of the mimosa, it snapped off, and unfortunately fell upon a

litter of infant pecaries, left sleeping by their maternal parent in the long grass.

The grunting and squeaking that immediately ensued not only caught the anxious ear of the sow-mother, who came galloping back to see what was the matter, but that of four spotted jaguars, by whom a sucking porker is as greatly esteemed as it was by Charles Lamb.

The adult peccary, with her progeny, at once bolted, but they would doubtless have been speedily devoured had not the four jaguars, with one consent, concentrated their attention upon the Doctor.

They were apparently out hunting independently, each on his own hook ; but all four at once evinced a decided preference for the human animal over the savoury, but less rare, porker.

But how to get at the banquet unexpectedly displayed before their ravished, ravenous vision, was the immediate difficulty, the jaguar not being an adept at climbing, never indeed attempting it except when he can leap from one branch to another.

Stimulated by the choice delicacy tantalisingly displayed before them, they made several attempts to reach the Doctor, happily without success, and they had been, from about ten minutes after he left the tent, till the moment we arrived, watching for his coming or falling down, in grim, restless expectation ; feline sagacity, limited as their experience of mankind must have been, enabling them to comprehend that no animal, biped or quadruped, could remain up there very long without meat or drink.

The Doctor had thus been kept in a state of paralysis and terror for full an hour, to him an age, when Felice fortunately discovered him. We were but just in time.

He was fast losing his senses, finding, as he did, that his strength was failing, that his trembling limbs would not sustain him many minutes longer, and that consequently down he must topple, to be torn to pieces and devoured by the ravenous beasts beneath.

This had been evident to Felice the moment she saw him. Our rifles quickly settled the business ; three out of the four jaguars being knocked over at the first discharge. The other bounded off, with a roar of rage and disappointment, which made the forest ring again.

The shock of the explosion, and sudden consciousness of rescue, entirely stopped the Doctor's failing pulse. He fainted outright, and came down headlong, but his fall was fortunately broken by his coat tails catching about midway, and momentarily arresting him.

He was terribly shaken as it was, though no bones were broken, and several hours passed before he was sufficiently himself to speak connectedly upon that subject or any other.

He was placed, comfortably as possible, upon the back of a mule, the negroes, walking by his side, supporting him.

This greatly delayed our progress ; the Guacho village was not nearly reached by nightfall, and we were only too glad to find shelter in a large solitary hut, tenanted by a Guacho Indian and his wife.

They were both Christians, the man immediately and with some ostentation informed us, and in the employ of a large breeder of stock.

The hut was tidily kept for a Guacho hut : there was a rude kind of table or bench, and horse's heads—the skeletons of course—in this instance cleanly picked and coarsely polished, to sit upon.

Miss Marston, being a lady, had a flat board fastened

upon *her* horse head, and a sheep-skin spread on that, luxuries which could be supplied to no one else.

The Guacho and his wife were preparing for supper when we claimed their hospitality; and they very politely invited us to join them—an offer declined with thanks.

The supper consisted of leg of horse, roasted in another compartment of the cabin, and brought in on the iron spit used in cooking it, one end of which spit was driven firmly into the earth floor. The two Guachos then helped themselves by cutting off hot slices, and eating as they cut, standing; and they appeared to do so with great relish. They had black rye bread, and a primitive kind of palm wine, which, to our vitiated European taste, was simply detestable.

The Guachos appeared to like it, but even they confessed a preference for the brandy with which we presented them.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GUACHO HUT.

WE were soon, with the exception of the Surgeon, in a pleasant frame of mind enough.

The water, for the Pampas, was strangely good—we could, consequently, help ourselves to excellent grog; and with the help of cigars and sandwiches, we should not do amiss till bed—that is, shake-down—time.

That proved to be a flattering illusion. The first promising piece of intelligence came from the Indian. A sand-storm was getting up, and situated as the hut was—close upon and between two vast tracts, one of clover, another of sand—we might, should the wind continue to blow in the same direction, be blocked up for many hours; until, in fact, the storm abated, and we were able to shovel our way out of the hut, against which the sand would probably be heaped to the depth of six or seven feet. It had never exceeded that, the Guachos said, in their time. There was no danger, therefore, nothing to fear; but the lady and her attendant would, if the threatening signs did not pass away, be obliged to leave the tent, which had, at Miss Marston's request, been pitched in the enclosed open yard, and seek shelter within the hut.

The words had scarcely passed the Guacho's lips, when Felice came in.

"There are three men on horseback, and carrying guns,

approaching the hut. They do not," she quickly added, "belong to Ronza's gang. They are coming slowly, very slowly, from the direction of Buenos Ayres, and are close at hand. Here they are," she said, as the sound of horses' hoofs caught our ears. "I will hand you the rifles."

There was a whip-handle knock at the hut door, which was opened by the Guacho, and in stepped three men of sad, dejected aspect, and evidently travel-wearied, well nigh to exhaustion. Our rifles were immediately put aside, and Harry, after his impulsive fashion, jumped up, placed three horses' heads at the service of the strangers, whilst, in just no time, I and the Lieutenant handed each a stiff glass—horn I should write—of brandy-and-water.

Two of the travellers drank eagerly, emptying the horns at a draught, the youngest, a mere lad, apparently not more than, if so much as, seventeen years of age, and of a singularly interesting cast of countenance, dimly as it could be seen in the dull gloom of the hut, just sipped his, and in a soft gentle voice asked in French for a glass of water.

This was promptly supplied. The strangers were assured of such shelter as the hut could afford, and a decent supper was placed before them by our darkies.

I judged the eldest to be about forty-five years of age, the other apparently a few years younger, and both were fine men, but broken, bowed down by fatigue, and, judging by their aspect, calamity of no ordinary kind.

Tears of gratefulness suffused their weary eyes for the reception they had met with.

"You are," said the eldest, "I believe and hope, Englishmen. Yes!—ah, thank God, then we are safe!—at least for the time. We are Frenchmen, escaped so far by miracle from Cayenne."

"From Cayenne, the French penal settlement in the north-east corner of South America? Cayenne must be immensely distant from this place," I added.

"An immense distance it must be. We have been hunted up and down through unknown tracts of forest, swamp, mountain fastnesses, during the last four months. We have, as I said, reached this place by miracle; and what place, district, state, we are now in, we know not, as towns and villages we have carefully avoided."

We said they were at no very great distance from Buenos Ayres—on La Plata river.

"La Plata River! We were on the banks of La Plata many weeks ago," he exclaimed. "How wildly we must have wandered since that sad, that terrible day! We were eight in company then, now——"

He was interrupted by an outcry of hysterical grief from the youngest stranger.

Miss Marston, who had come in from the tent, and had, I noticed, been intently observing the youth, here rose, stepping quietly towards him, and taking his hand, said in a gentle, sympathising voice, and a sweet caressing smile—

"Come with me, I would speak with you!"

The lad hesitated, and Miss Marston, bending down, whispered a few words in his ear. Blushing crimson, he immediately rose, and, his hand still in the lady's, left the room with her.

"Confoundedly odd that, Lieutenant Marston?" said Harry.

"I think so too," said Marston.

"Nothing odd about it," said the Doctor, who had scarcely spoken since his little forest adventure. "Nothing odd about it. The youth is a young lady!"

"That is true, messieurs," said the older stranger.
"She is my daughter, Louise de Veron."

"Your daughter, monsieur? Surely ladies are not sent for political offences, which, I presume, you and your companions were, to the pestiferous settlement of Cayenne?"

"You judge correctly in both respects, sir. Louise, with her mother, my wife, conceived the insensate project of coming out to Cayenne to effect my liberation, and that of my wife's brother, this gentleman. They succeeded, but at a fearful cost! Better, infinitely better, that we had been left to perish, rot, than she should now be lying in a bloody shroud on the banks of La Plata river! It was my thoughtless mention of that name which called forth my child's passionate burst of grief."

"Was Madame de Veron killed by jaguars, tigers?" asked the Surgeon, whose whole mind was still in a state of confused bewilderment—jaguar-haunted.

"Yes," said M. de Veron, with fierce emphasis; "by tigers—*human* tigers! I will tell you how it happened in a few words. It sometimes relieves me to do so.

"It was a calm, delightful evening. We had begun to hope—believe, that the hunters were no longer on our track; that we should finally escape to Europe.

"In that mood of mind we rested ourselves on the grassy margin of La Plata River, intending to bivouac there for the night. Evening—still, serene, peace-breathing—was stealing over the quiet water and landscape, multitudes of water-fowl were settling on the placid stream, when an elk bounded past in the not far off distance. I, with my brother-in-law here, gave instant pursuit, followed, though at first we knew it not, by my daughter, who was lighter, swifter of foot than either of us, and delighted in the excitement of the chase.

"Our endeavour was to intercept the elk by crossing its path at a spot near which it would probably pass, and which we could reach sooner than it could, fleet as elks are.

"We were successful, but the time spent in achieving success was much longer than we expected, and the moon had risen in fullest splendour as we neared the spot, on our return, where we had left Madame de Veron and four comrades who had escaped with us from Cayenne.

"Suddenly we were terror-stricken—paralysed for some moments by volleys of musket fire, in the direction where we had left my wife and friends.

"Hurrying onward with beating hearts, we soon came in view of the terrible scene. A party of our pursuers, six in number, had suddenly come upon them, commanding them to surrender; and upon their refusal, opened fire upon them. It was returned. Four of the hunters had fallen dead or mortally wounded, and only one of our friends was standing when we came within musket-shot. We fired at once, not, under such circumstances, coolly or skilfully. One only of the surviving ruffians was hit, and he perhaps not dangerously, as both rode off together.

"The one of our companions who still lived, survived long enough to brokenly relate what had happened during our accursed absence. Not to me. A universe had crumbled at my feet, and I, lost to all sense except the stunned consciousness, as it were, of an irreparable loss, was down upon my face by the side of my murdered wife. A rifle bullet had pierced her heart—that heart which so short a time before had beat with such devoted faithfulness for me."

The unhappy gentleman ceased speaking, and motioned for the brandy-caraffe to be handed to him. He drank

heavily, and his bowed head, clasped in his outspread hands, dropped on the bench-table.

"Syncope," exclaimed Dr. Kirwan. "Stand aside; let me attend to him. He will soon revive."

"Your escape from Cayenne, monsieur," said I, addressing the silent brother-in-law, "must have been planned with singular skill, carried out with marvellous courage and audacity."

"Chiefly by Carib-cunning," said Monsieur Penard. "If you should at any time wish to hear how—"

"What is the matter now, Felice?" I asked, as the girl rushed excitedly into the room. "Is the tent on fire?"

"No, but it soon may be. Ronza—I am sure it is he—Ronza, with between thirty and forty of his fellows, is coming direct towards this hut, guided, no doubt, by the horse and mule tracks on the sand. And the sand-storm is coming too," added Felice. "We are caught at last."

"It looks very like it, upon my word. Tell Miss Marston and the young—young person with her to hurry in. We must barricade the hut, and make as stout a fight as may be. Perhaps the sand-storm may prove a friend."

As I was speaking, Miss Marston and Louise de Veron came in. I, as well as a few brief sentences enabled me to do so, explained the situation to the two French gentlemen—De Veron had recovered from his nervous fit; and the Guachos, man and wife, willingly assisting, we, in a very few minutes rendered the hut secure from being carried by a *coup de main* at all events.

We were nine well-armed men, including the Guacho, under cover, and ought therefore to stand a siege of

some duration. And we should do so with good hope, the Indian assuring us that—supposing the sand-storm did not compel the brigands to ride off if they would save their own life—the firing, if it came to that, would be sure to be reported by some one at the nearest village, and help be sent.

The Guacho woman, who had been observing the advancing party from the hut roof, came in at the moment, and hearing what her husband said, exclaimed—

“The horsemen are still a good way off, and come on slowly, as if their horses were tired out. Let me take a horse, the freshest, and be off to the village.”

The Guacho clapped his hands.

“That is right, Maria. Be gone at once. Take the lady’s horse, if she will permit, and then you cannot be stopped or overtaken. A clever woman, eh, Señors?” added the husband. “Hers is a better head than mine.”

In a very few minutes the Guacho woman was going over the ground in the bright moonlight at racing speed.

Harry and I went out upon the flat roof to reconnoitre, lying, of course, face downwards upon it.

The slow approach of the horsemen was not owing to their horses being blown, as Maria supposed. They were apprehensive, it seemed, of being smothered by the whirling, eddying sea billows, closer to which the angle at which they were coming towards the hut, brought them at every step. The anxious question they were halting to consider was, we felt sure, whether the wind was or was not dying away.

I had some right to speak as to wind-weather signs, and had no doubt whatever, neither had Harry, that the breeze—it was really nothing more than that—was going down.

"It is well," I remarked, "that Maria"—how oddly such names sound as applied to Indian girls and women—"it is well that Maria has sped to summon help. I wonder whether her departure was observed by those fellows?"

"I should think not, as they have not attempted pursuit. By Jove," Harry went on, "there are thirty-two of them! The reward offered by Lopez for Marston's capture has helped Ronza to a good many recruits. I suppose, Robert," he added, "it's all right about that young person? She ain't shamming 'young lady'?" What do you say?"

"Don't bother your brains with such absurd surmises. One would suppose you had something else to think about just now."

"As to that, I can think of more than one thing at a time. For example, I am thinking that if Ronza, who one sees can hardly sit his horse—one of the pleasant effects of that blessed bull hiding he got—should venture about three hundred yards nearer, I could pot him easily."

"If he comes something within a thousand yards we might do it with these long Enfields. And he would think himself perfectly safe at that distance if he saw us taking aim."

"Very likely; but I am afraid he won't give us a chance. Suppose we try and provoke him to come on. No! Well, I shall if you won't," and springing to his feet, Harry, waving his hand, shouted contemptuous defiance at the hesitating squad, in a voice which rang out like a trumpet.

He was heard, as plainly as he was seen, and half-a-dozen muskets were instinctively aimed at him and discharged.

The bullets fell ridiculously short, and the madeap's derisive laughter pealed again and again with rattling volume of sound over the moon-lit waste.

One horseman, Romero, as it proved, of more fiery temper than the rest, galloped towards us, and reining up when he had come within what he judged to be possible shooting distance, levelled his rifle and fired at Roland ; instantly wheeling about, and having increased his distance considerably, he loaded again, came back and again fired.

His bullets still falling short, and not seeing that we had rifles with us—I was also standing up, very absurd thing to do—came each time nearer and nearer.

"By Jove," said Harry, "if he comes but a little nearer, I shall have a shy!"

"We will shoot together," I said. "That will give us a double chance."

He did come nearer, much nearer next time, so near that we both distinctly heard his ball whistle past between us. We did not, however, pick up our rifles that time, but prepared to do so the next.

Impunity, and the applauding shouts of his brother brigands, so greatly emboldened him, that he came much nearer than before, and being evidently a good shot, one of us might have got his quietus, but that the sudden flashing on his startled sight of our rifles disturbed his aim. His bullets flew wide ; ours, one of them at all events, went straight to its mark. Romero, with a fierce scream, dropped his rifle, tossed his arms wildly in the air, and fell off his horse.

He was not killed outright, as we could plainly see his agonised writhings on the sand, which he madly clutched at and flung about by handfuls.

Enraged at the sight, and at last convinced, like ourselves, that the wind was dying away, and no present danger to be apprehended from the sand storm, the whole lot spurred forward shouting furiously, as much to sustain their own courage as to terrify us.

The warlike clamour was unreal. At the spot where Romero fell they pulled up, and whilst two dismounted to succour that wounded hero, the others again contemplated the situation with evident misgiving.

I had dropped down myself and pulled down Harry ; the firing had brought on the roof Lieutenant Marston, the two French gentlemen, and the Guacho. The Surgeon remained below with the ladies, where he would be in readiness to assist the wounded, if need be.

We thus presented a row of eight rifles projecting over the edge of the roof, and as we all lay down upon our faces at full length thereon, we presented no mark for theirs.

It was true that when they got near, close to the hut, they would be completely sheltered from our fire, but till they did, there would be an unpleasant two or three minutes to pass, whilst clearing the intervening space.

Their hesitation did not last long. Again they spurred forward, and though receiving a check for a moment from a simultaneously-delivered fire, by which four saddles were emptied, came swiftly on, and before we could reload were safe under the mud walls of the hut, into which they, after dismounting, began forcing their way, by smashing blows with the brass butts of their rifles on the frail windows and doors, accompanied by diabolical threats and execrations.

The ladies, with Felice and the Doctor, hurried up to join us on the roof, and in a moment or so the crashing

and rending of wood told us too plainly the brigands were successfully breaking into the hut.

"We have," I said, "made a blunder in tactics. We ought to have remained below. However, they will not dare attempt to force their way up here, through that narrow aperture."

"No," said the Guacho, "they won't do that, but they will fire the hut, and compel us to surrender if we would not be burnt alive! Better give up at once. Perhaps Maria will bring rescue."

The terrible truth intimated by the Indian could not be gainsayed. The next minute the threat of firing the hut and roasting us alive was hurled at us from below, from the throats of a score of triumphant brigands.

We gazed at each other in speechless consternation ; held for a few moments a silent council of despair.

A startling cry broke suddenly from Felice.

"God and the Holy Virgin!" she shouted, "have heard our prayers. We are saved ! Look, look ! There are fifty horsemen coming on at least. There, they are friends ; for see, Maria leads them on, waving her handkerchief."

It was true, and a shout of delight burst from us all, except the Frenchmen.

"Are you sure those horsemen are friends ?" asked De Veron, anxiously.

"They cannot be enemies. Señor Ronza," I added, shouting down the opening in the roof, "we surrender. There is no need to fire the hut."

The answer was a coarse malediction, which much pleased me. It proved that Ronza and his followers were not only aware of the rapid approach of the horsemen led by the Guacho woman, but that they were not friends of

his. M. de Veron's vague dread seemed a groundless one.

I took another scrutinizing look at our coming friends. They were armed with rifles, wore a curious nondescript sort of uniform, and each man carried a lasso at his saddle bow.

It was, I concluded, a party of foraging irregular horse, whom Maria must have met at no great distance from the hut.

Lieutenant Marston agreed with me, but there was no hilarity in his tone and look.

"This country," he said, "is in a wild state. There are bands of broken, desperate men roving about, seeking whom they may devour; and caring nothing for nationalities. However, we must accept our fate whatever it may be. It is a pity though," he added, "that you and your gallant young friend should have involved yourselves in these perils."

This was a damper. Harry declared it to be bosh, and we went below; Miss Marston and disguised Mademoiselle de Veron, whose nervous agitation was, I thought, quite uncalled for, being assisted down, pale, trembling, scarcely able to stand. They both looked like persons about to be delivered over to immediate death, instead of having been almost miraculously delivered from it.

The large common room was crowded with Ronza's gang and the new comers. In point of ruffianly aspect I could not but mentally admit there was not a pin to choose between the two bands.

Ronza was conversing with the commander of the fresh arrivals, and scowling as savagely at the man, who was questioning him from a printed paper, as he did at us. There was surely comfort in that.

Not much in the flashing exultation with which the Captain of our rescuers, having finished with Ronza, regarded us.

"This is a very fortunate meeting, gentlemen," he began, with an ironical tone and smile. "It is a rare piece of good fortune to unexpectedly catch so many valuable birds in one net."

"You M. de Veron, you M. Penard, and the young lady-gentleman with you—the printed descriptions of you are exact—are wanted at Cayenne by the General commanding there; and *your* presence, Lieutenant Marston, is required, as you well know, in the Capital city of the illustrious President and Liberator of La Plata States. Señora Marston will of course accompany her brother, and I cannot think for a moment of separating the three gallant Englishmen from their friends!"

"Have the kindness, sir," exclaimed the Doctor, greatly alarmed at finding himself included amongst the captives, "have the kindness, sir, to take notice that I am a peaceable English citizen, who has in no way meddled or mixed himself up in these good people's affairs, am entirely ignorant of them, and travelling in this accur—hem—glorious country, with the sole object of studying its splendid botany, for which asinine folly, I admit——"

"Spare yourself any further expenditure of your not very fluent French," interrupted the officer, with a brutal laugh. "You must reserve your explanations for a future opportunity. And now, ladies and gentlemen, night time though it be, we must get *en route* without delay. You, Señor Ronza, will, I suppose, do the same with your fellows. It is a little vexing to have lost the reward of valour and perseverance, just as you were about to clutch it, but it may be your turn next."

"And pray, Mr. Captain," exclaimed Roland, "who the devil are you that presume to kidnap people in this sort of fashion? By whose authority do you act, and to what place do you mean to take us?"

"That insular bounce, my young Briton, won't avail you here. I will, however, condescend to answer your three abruptly put questions.

"I am Captain Belez, attached to the South American service generally, but to none in particular, and at this moment acting for the illustrious President, Francesco Solano Lopez, to whose Capital city I shall have the honour, I trust, of safely conducting the distinguished company I have had the good fortune to so unexpectedly fall in with. The two French patriots—three, including the young lady—will, I doubt not, out of complaisance to Napoleon, for whom the illustrious President has, it is known, a high esteem, be passed on to Cayenne."

The words of the bandit chieftain, for such he really was, uttered with the smiling smoothness of a satanic irony, were really a sentence of death upon us all, with the exception, perhaps—a very shadowy perhaps—of Roland, the Surgeon, and myself; yet judging by the aspect of the assuredly doomed ones, that sentence did not appear to greatly terrify them.

The flashing light which gleamed in their eyes was that of scornful pride rather than terror, as if in that trying moment the consciousness of moral superiority to the dastardly ruffians into whose power they had fallen, had kindled to flame every spark of latent heroism with which nature and nobility of life and thought had gifted them.

Reaction would let down before long that extreme moral tension, but for a time its fierce self-sustainment

was undoubtedly genuine, true ; and on the part of the men partially vented itself in haughty words of contemptuous defiance; the only effect of which was to deepen the sardonic smile that curled the ashen lips, and glowered in the wolfish eyes of the bandit Captain.

Harry's voice did not swell that torrent of bitter and somewhat undignified vituperation. To me, knowing his recklessly impulsive character when strongly excited, this was a warning. He was likely enough about to do some wild foolish thing, which would bring instant destruction, not only upon his male friends but the lady, towards whom he, I saw, was silently sidling through the intervening bandits.

I got close behind him as quickly as I could, and was but just in time. Our rifles had been taken from us, but Harry, I knew, had a loaded revolver in his right hand hunting-jacket pocket, and his hand, I saw, was in that pocket.

Belez approached Miss Marston, and with mock courtesy solicited the honour of conducting his charming prisoner to her horse, at the same time rudely seizing her hand. She uttered an exclamation of disgust and alarm, at the same moment flashing upon Roland an appeal for protection. With the swiftness of thought the pistol was pulled out ; in another second a bullet would have effectually settled the Captain's business and our own, had I not caught Harry's hand and forcibly pressed it down.

"D——n!" he exclaimed, turning fiercely round, "who's that?"

"Don't be a fool, Harry!" I hurriedly whispered in English. (Thanks partly to the gloom of the hut, partly to the crowding of its occupants, Roland's hasty movement had not been observed.) "Don't be a fool, Harry, if you can help it, unless you wish to see the lady mur-

dered on the spot. And Miss Marston," I added, "you really must control yourself. Permit the bandit to lead you out. Patience and prudence may yet get us out of this serape."

"Well, Señora," said Belez, whose attention had fortunately for a moment been diverted by a question put to him by Ronza, "well, Señora, shall I have the honour?"

The hand, again seized, was disdainfully yielded, the Captain led the way, and in a very short time we were all *en route*—immediately whither, it would have been bootless to inquire.

CHAPTER XL.

TRUE AS STEEL.

THE wind had shifted, and the sand waves were rolling off, leaving the course taken by Belez entirely clear. We parted with Ronza and his fellows at about a mile's distance from the hut, and pushed on rapidly as possible till day-dawn, when we arrived at the well-known extensive cattle-breeding establishment of Messrs. Gotlieb, natives of the country, but of German descent.

Belez took unceremonious possession of the place as barracks for his ruffianry—a visitation which the proprietors civilly yielded to as a matter of course, as well as of policy, resistance being quite out of the question. Law in those regions, at that period of general disturbance and confusion, was simply the law of whoever happened for the moment to be strongest.

Belez, apprehending no immediate molestation, determined to rest himself and his fellows for a day or two in those comfortable quarters, eating, drinking, sleeping, and making merry to their hearts' desire, at Messrs. Gotlieb's expense—their supply being supplemented by our hampers, the contents of which were confiscated to the general use. Still we were generously allowed our fair share, and the choicest was set apart for the ladies—Felice who decided as to “choicest,” liberally interpreting the term “ladies” to include herself.

The Carib girl brought me a message early on the

morrow of our arrival. Her mistress, Mademoiselle Marston, wished to see me at once, and privately.

I followed to the lady's presence, and had an interview, which was brief and to the purpose. Miss Marston, I may remark, was pale as marble, and her statuesque features lit up by heroic resolution—lustrously so. She seemed to have cast off all woman's weakness, clothed herself in man's full panoply of pride.

She came to business at once. "You can have no wish, I suppose, Mr. Sabine, either that you yourself or your friend, Mr. Roland, should be shut up in a Paraguayan dungeon, the only frequented issue from which is to an obscure, nameless grave ?"

I assured Miss Marston that I had a decided objection to such an entrance and exit, and thought I could answer in the same sense for my friend Roland.

"And you would, if you could, save poor Louise de Veron from dying of pestilential disease at Cayenne ; her relatives from a speedier, more merciful death at the same place !"

"Unquestionably I would. Can you doubt it ?"

"Had I doubted it, Mr. Sabine, I should not have asked for this interview. Their liberation and that of the Doctor can be easily effected, you consenting. Mr. Elsworthy, of Rio, has, I believe, instructions to honour your drafts to any amount."

"Yes, that is so ; reasonable amount is, of course, meant—but you may say any amount not altogether preposterous."

"Just so ; well, I and my brother are the only prisoners of this fellow Belez who *cannot* be ransomed. Of his letting us go free, for *any* consideration whatever, there is not the shadow of a chance. It is not only the

large reward offered by Lopez for my brother's capture, but another and yet more potent consideration—regard for his own life—that will ensure his fidelity to the Dictator; but he would most assuredly set you, your friends, Louise and her relatives, free, if bribed by a considerable sum—it must be a very considerable sum—to do so."

"You rejoice, and at the same time sadden me, Miss Marston. I shall not haggle at the amount required. But for yourself and your brother! Can nothing be done? Present, actual gold is more dazzling in a ruffian's eyes than a much larger sum in promises. I am rich—at least my father is. I am now an only son, and I would strain a point most willingly, most gladly."

"I know you would, Mr. Sabine," she said, tears starting to her beautiful eyes, irradiating them with a diviner lustre. "But your generosity would be of no avail. It is useless to attempt the impossible. Do not think of it! We must accept, as we best may, the gift of a severe fate. I have something more to say," added Miss Marston, a bright flush mantling her pale face, "do not mention the subject we are speaking of to your friend Roland. When all is settled with Belez, we shall quietly leave you, departing without Mr. Roland's knowledge. Otherwise, he being of so chivalrous a disposition, might insist—insist—you know what I would say?"

"He might insist upon sharing your fate, whatever that fate may be. I think it very likely he would; and since to sacrifice himself could not, in the slightest degree, help you, it would, perhaps, be an act of suicidal madness on his part. Yet I don't know. A young man loving devotedly—especially such a young man as my friend Harry—is sometimes prompted by a higher

wisdom than cold, unsympathising reason can attain to. I will, however, as you advise, refrain from consulting him on the subject ; and, moreover, I *will* endeavour to out-bid the Paraguayan President in your own and your brother's behalf. If I do not, my impetuous young friend may take it into his head to pistol me for having divorced his fate from yours."

The lady smiled faintly, sighed, and said, "It is utterly useless, I repeat, to attempt bribing Belez to release *us*. He dare not. The terror with which Francesco Solano Lopez has impressed the most hardened ruffians in his service is marvellous. They stand in as much awe of him as they did of his brutal father, who is now only spoken of, with bated breath, as '*Il Defunto*.' No—save yourselves ; leave us to our destiny; you have, indeed, no choice but to do so. When I next bid you farewell, Mr. Sabine, it will be for ever. I have ceased to nurse myself in illusions.

"And when," she added, with tears in her trembling voice, as well as in her sad, diffused eyes, and taking a locket suspended by a light gold chain from her neck, "when the strong hours, which ever bear healing on their wings to the true and brave, have assuaged his grief, give Harry Roland this. It is my mother's portrait, set round with her own and my hair, and the most valued treasure I possess—a sacred relic, the bequeathment of which he will understand to be at once a death-token and the memorial of a sincere and constant affection. Adieu, till to-morrow," and she hurried from the room.

Leaving it hurriedly myself, I surprised Felice, who, I saw by her doleful weeping countenance, had been listening. No wonder the affectionate simple-hearted

creature wept. Tears were staining my man's cheeks. Ha! I would prevail with Belcz for the Marston's ransom, if, to do so, I had to pledge half my inheritance.

It was odd, but not till many hours afterwards did it occur to me Felice would be sure to inform Harry that her mistress intended, without leave-taking, to bid him a silent, eternal farewell.

I immediately sought Belez and initiated the negotiation. It was a simple affair. I had only to hand over an order for a sufficient sum upon Mr. Elsworthy of Rio, giving my word of honour, which he knew from Romero could be implicitly relied upon, that it would be paid; and myself, Roland, the Doctor, the two Frenchmen, the French demoiselle, and the Carib girl, if we wished it, were free. He had no orders to capture, to hunt them, Roland and me, down. President Lopez neither knew nor cared anything about us. Belez drove a pretty stiff bargain with me, nevertheless; and I was fain at last to sign an order on Mr. Elsworthy for a thousand pounds, reckoned in English money. A large lump of black mail that to be grabbed by a South American bandit!

That part of the business concluded, I bluntly asked him to name the sum he required for the liberation of Lieutenant Marston and his sister.

"Not all the gold in Rio," Belcz as bluntly replied, "would purchase their release."

"Nonsense! I will double the reward offered by the President for their capture."

"It could not be done, sir," said Belez, "if you were to quintuple the reward. I will be candid with you. There are amongst my fellows secret agents of the President, well known to be such by all of them. They keep strict watch even over me, and if I attempted to

betray the Dictator, I should be instantly seized, manacled, and, if not settled with on the spot, sent off to Paraguay for immediate execution. Set Lieutenant Marston or his sister free ! Sancta Maria ! It were as safe to pluck the President himself by the beard as to do that ! ”

Thus decisively rebuked, I asked the nature of the offence committed by the Marstons which had so excited the President’s vindictive ire.

“ I scarcely understand the matter myself,” said Belez. “ Captain Marston, it seems, was cognisant of a plot, a military court plot, the object of which was to depose the Dictator, perhaps to take his life. It was in some way nipped in the bud, but the President has not been able to discover who were the chief conspirators, whom, however, he dimly suspects to be individuals in high station, and near his person. He would give anything to ascertain beyond doubt who those deadly enemies are. Captain Marston, it is said, is the only man who could furnish the desired information, and he, from a principle of honour, obstinately refuses to make the disclosure. The President is now intent upon subduing that iron will, by assailing it through Captain Marston’s well-known love of his children. He will be offered the alternative of making a full disclosure, or of seeing his children first tortured and then massacred before his eyes.”

“ He will make the disclosure required,” said I. “ No bond of honour between conspirators would justify or excuse a father who hesitated in such a case.”

“ I don’t know,” said Belez, in a low voice, and furtively looking round to be sure that no one was within hearing ; “ I don’t know. There is for and

against complying with the President's demand. Captain Marston perhaps thinks, as in his place I should think, that the disclosure made, neither his own life nor the lives of his children would be in the slightest degree more secure. Nay, less so—they might be only the more promptly snuffed out. Wheu the stolen orange is sucked dry, it is safer to bury or burn the rind!"

"You believe, then, that the Marston family are irrevocably doomed?"

"I do; except indeed—" Belez paused irresolutely. Presently he said, "I am not, Señor Inglese, spite of appearances, one of those ferocious freebooters who take a demoniac pleasure in shedding blood or in the infliction of torture. I would especially, if I could, consistently with my own safety, save Señora Marston from the terrible fate which I fear awaits her, unless—. Is your friend Roland—Harry, I have heard you call him—rich as you are?"

"Perhaps not. But my purse is at his disposal. Why do you ask?"

"A thought glanced through my brain, that, if he were, the lady—not her brother or father—might be saved. But the risk for himself, spite of his nationality, would be very great. Britannia has long arms, but she would not care to be at the trouble and expense of stretching them so far out as Paraguay, unless, perhaps, a duke or a bishop were imperilled."

"Excuse me, Señor, but let me ask you to speak of what you really understand. How could Mr. Roland, if he had sufficient money at his command rescue Miss Marston, though not her relatives, from the clutches of Lopez?"

"By venturing to Paraguay, in the character of a Brit-

ish trader or merchant, obtain an introduction to Madam Lynch—which he could easily do, her Dictatoresship being facile of access—and bargain with her for the young lady's release. It is doubtful, very doubtful, that in the Marston case even her Excellency—as she insists on being styled—would dare to interfere," added Belez; "and the *attempt*, if discovered, to tamper with the course of justice, would be summarily punished by half-a-dozen leaden bullets, or the more ignoble halter."

"In plain language, to make the attempt would be sheer madness, a wanton casting away of life?"

"Something very like that. Still there *might* be the ghost of a chance."

"I must ask you not to suggest such an act of madness to Mr. Roland. It would be nothing less than murder to do so."

"I will not. I pledge you my word I will not. We shall start," added Belez, "to-morrow morning at dawn. I would advise you, Mr. Roland, and your French friends to make direct for Rio and at once. If, moreover, they are wise, the escaped Cayenne convicts will embark forthwith for England by the English mail steamer. There are always French men-of-war in Brazilian waters, who, if intelligence should reach them that political prisoners escaped from Cayenne were on board a Brazilian vessel, would board her and seize the fugitives without a moment's hesitation."

I promised to tell M. de Veron what he said, and we parted.

The joy, the gratitude of M. de Veron, his daughter and brother-in-law, were expressed with the earnest, *exalted* vivacity which characterises the nation, but the exultant outburst was checked in a moment, as by the sudden

booming of a death-knell, with the words which spasmodically escaped the bereaved husband's trembling lips—

"Ah if my wife—if Adèle were now with us!"

Thus ever runs the river of our chequered lives, darkling with settled shadows, briefly bright with glints of sunshine. The ecstacy which sang along my veins as I drank in the pure tenderness of sympathy expressed in Emilie's letter, was rebuked, chilled by the tidings of my brother's death; and now the sunburst of unhoped for freedom, suddenly illumining the path of those worn wanderers in the valley of the Shadow of Death, was eclipsed by the memory of a cold dark grave, on the sullen shores of La Plata river. An old, old story; the stern moral of all human tales—that the trail and slime of the Serpent, stain and defile the brightest flowers of earth.

The mercurial, elastic temperament of the Frenchmen soon, for a time, threw off that depressing gloom. The brightening future of his child, his Louise, shed light and calm upon the father's heart; and those spells of power—home, peace and love, again become possible realities to Jules Penard, whose wife and children were safe in England, softened to a tenderness of sorrow the brother's grief for his sister's untimely death.

They asked if Mademoiselle and Lieutenant Marston were not also ransomed, and my despairing assurance that for *them* nothing could be done, excited, especially in Louise de Veron, bitter grief.

"And your brave chivalrous friend, M. Roland," said Louise de Veron, "how will he bear up against this stroke of fate? I feel sure he will not abandon nor permit himself to be separated from his adored Ellen. Only death could do that."

I explained the course I proposed to follow with re-

spect to Mr. Roland, and the gentlemen agreed with me that it was the wisest possible plan to adopt. Mademoiselle de Veron said she thought so too, but felt sure it would be unavailing:

"You will not be able to conceal the departure of Lieutenant and Mademoiselle Marston with these brigands for any length of time, at the most for a few hours only; your friend knows their destination to be Paraguay, and will follow them at any hazard. That is my firm conviction," she added, "unless, indeed, you determine to hold him back by force."

I could only say that I hoped he would prove amenable to reason, knowing as he would, how utterly futile any attempt on his part must be to avert her fate.

"Mr. Roland will certainly know that he cannot avert the doom of his beloved," said Louise de Veron, "and also know that he can share it."

We had been talking in this doleful mood for some time, when Felice came to us, not showing in speech or manner, alarm or anxiety—a fact which I afterwards recalled wonderingly to mind, as Harry, because of his ardent love for her mistress, was much more than myself a favourite of hers. She coolly said Mr. Roland had been taken suddenly ill, and was sickening, the family doctor said, of a frightfully contagious fever peculiar to the Pampas, and often fatal to Europeans—to white people.

Panic-stricken by this new calamity, I was hastening to him when I was stopped by the Gotlieb's slave doctor—a creole, who, judging by his quack-gibberish possessed about as much medical skill as myself, perhaps less.

"Your friend," he said, "can not be seen. It would be almost certain death to any white person who should go near him."

I was pushing on regardless of the Creole's prohibition or warning, when one of the Brothers Gotlieb came up, and insisted upon my not going into the sick-room. It would not only be highly dangerous to myself he said, but I should probably spread the contagion through the household.

Neither he nor his brother, thoroughly acclimatised though both of them were, would venture to do so. "It would be sheer madness. Felice, the Carib girl, who says she once had a fever of the like kind, which, it appears, is seldom fatal to Indians, and never attacks one of them twice, has volunteered to stay with, and nurse your friend. He has evidently a strong constitution, and will, I have little doubt, recover. Should it prove so," continued M. Gotlieb with a significant smile, "the incident will be a fortunate one for himself as he will not be able to accompany or follow the Señora Marston to Paraguay, that is to certain death. The brigand chief," he added, in a low tone, "has told me all. You must console yourself with that reflection."

A dismal consolation! However, angry words, passionate lamentings would avail nothing, and I rejoined my French friends with whom I found Dr. Kirwan. He, like me, had been peremptorily refused admittance to the sufferer's room, but he had supplied Felice with medicines and full instructions as to how the drugs should be administered. He had heard of the Pampas fever, but never witnessed a case. The symptoms, he added, as described by Felice, were most extraordinary, and to him inexplicable. He almost thought that the dread of never seeing her beloved mistress again, was disordering her intellect. It was indeed solely in obedience to Miss Marston's entreaties, that she had consented to remain behind,

The dark night hours limped slowly away, and I left my bed just as the first faint streaks of dawn were visible, to bid Ellen Marston and her brother a last, and as I believed, an eternal farewell. I was too late; the brigands with their captives had been gone upwards of an hour.

Felice spoke to me out of Harry's bed-room window. He was, she thought, better, and seemed to be progressing favourably. "Is he sensible?" I asked, in a low tone, so as not to be heard by him. "Does he *know*?"

Felice shook her head, placed a finger on her lip, and closed the window.

On the following morning as we were sitting down to breakfast one of the Brothers Gotlieb hastily entered the room. He came back to tell us that Felice and Mr. Roland had disappeared, gone off during the night on horseback, no doubt with the intention of overtaking the captives and going on with them to Paraguay. The Pampas fever was a hoax, a pretence to enable Mr. Roland to evade our vigilance, escape from our control.

"Here is a sealed note," added M. Gotlieb, "which Mr. Roland left in his chamber addressed to Mr. Robert Sabine."

Thunderstruck, I hastily broke the seal and ran over the words, which, as I read, seemed to burn themselves into my brain.

"**M**Y TRUEST DEAREST FRIEND, and never more dear, more precious in my esteem and affection than at this moment, when, as I do not affect to conceal from myself, I may never again meet you in this world, never again clasp that strong faithful hand in mine.

"Ask your own heart, Robert, how it were possible I could live a worthy, self-respecting life, after such a separa-

tion? Ellen the young, the pure, the beautiful, departing on the dark road to death, uncheered, unsustained, coldly abandoned to her fate by one, bound by the most sacred ties, to shield her from, or share it with her! Impossible! Utterly impossible! No, no! One love, one hope, and, if it must be so, one early grave.

“Felice—true-hearted, faithful girl—Felice and I have taken care that Ellen should not have the slightest suspicion of my determination to follow her to Paraguay. I shall not come up with the brigands till they have reached that accursed city. Then it will be too late to ask me to retrace my steps.

“I do not, Robert, absolutely despair of deliverance even from this dark peril. Felice believes that Madame Lynch may, for a large sum of money, be induced to bring about the escape not only of Ellen, but of Captain and Lieutenant Marston. If it prove so, I shall draw upon you at Rio for any sum that may be required. This is no doubt a forlorn hope, but it is the only one left to your friend,

“HARRY.”

“N.B.—Let me beg, entreat you, Robert, if you do not hear from me, if no draft for a swinging sum, payable to bearer by my order, is presented at Rio, say within a month, to embark at once for England, with our French friends, to whom I present my kindest regards, my cordial felicitations. Mademoiselle de Veron will not feel surprised that I have found myself powerless to abandon her friend Ellen.

“How could I have looked her, looked you in the face again, had I done so? Do not, therefore, Robert, bear me harshly in your thoughts for this rash, mad act of

mine, as you may at first deem it. I feel convinced, as certainly as that I now live and breathe, that had it been possible for me to have left Ellen to perish without an effort to save her, I should have gone mad, or have died by my own hand.

“ You will kindly remember me to ‘*Portrait charmant*,’ who, I have little doubt, after reading the letter I intend posting to her from Paraguay, when all hope shall have fled, if that is a consequence now hanging in the stars, will insist upon your returning to her and happiness without delay. I shouldn’t be sorry if my missive made her a trifle ill, and that her aunt, the widow Alford, to whom I shall also post a few lines, writes to tell you so. At all events, do not remain prowling about these savage wildernesses alone. What on earth would become of you here when you no longer have me to see after and take care of you ? Just reflect upon that !

“ Present my affectionate regards to your good father, and to all young as well as old folks at home. Adieu, once more.

“ H.R.”

I shall not attempt to depict the state of mind in which the perusal of this note left me. For many hours I could neither think nor act. M. de Veron, Penard, Mademoiselle Louise, were very kind to, solicitous for me. At length calmness, coherency of thought, came back to me, and I made known my fixed determination to follow Roland to Paraguay. De Veron and Penard, after long hesitation agreed that I could not act otherwise.

“ You must send immediately, M. Sabine,” said M. de Veron, “ to Rio for a large sum of money. My daughter Louise, with the Doctor and your two negroes, will at once proceed there ; and M. Elsworthy, we know, will

find means of safely sending you the sum required. Louise, you will, I am sure, commend to the kind protection of Madame Elsworthy. She will then be in perfect safety. I shall be relieved of an immense anxiety, and we—you, myself, and Penard—can set off with lightened hearts to effect your young friends deliverance."

" You and M. Penard ? Why should *you* incur such peril ? Surely you are jesting ? "

" I was never more in earnest. My brother-in-law and I have been talking the matter over, and we find it will be impossible to leave you, to whom we owe our lives, to encounter so great a danger without companionship. Do not, Monsieur Sabine, attempt to argue us out of our determination. It would be useless. We are much older than you, and years *should* bring maturity of counsel."

" But how if you are recognised, seized by Lopez, and sent back to Cayenne ? "

" There is, Penard and I also agree, little fear of that. As the brigand chief told you, Lopez neither knows nor cares anything about us. Then, we can assume such a disguise as will render detection almost impossible. If there be risk we must face it—*voilà tout !* Holy blue ! the idea of leaving a young man, after what he has done for us, to engage alone in such an enterprise ! It is out of the question ! We go with you."

This resolve was, I found, unshakeable. Louise, the Surgeon, and negroes, left for Rio, and we were to await the return of Dr. Kirwan, (who could not believe there could be any danger for him in a visit to a regularly, if despotically, governed city) and the negroes, with the gold required, at the now readily and really hospitable mansion of the Messrs. Gotlieb. Our messengers were, of course, to use the utmost possible despatch.

Louise de Veron was bitterly grieved at parting with her father and uncle, but appeared to be in some degree reconciled to it by the hope that they might aid in effecting the release, of saving the lives, of her much loved friend Mademoiselle Marston, and her chivalrous lover. It struck me, also, not for the first time, that the fate of Lieutenant Marston was not absolutely a matter of indifference to her.

CHAPTER XII.

ESCAPING FROM CAYENNE.

M. DE VERON was naturally a gentleman of buoyant temper, and, as I have before mentioned, but temporarily subdued in spirit by the heaviest blows of adverse fortune. He now put on, as we may say, an extra flow of vivacity in order, it seemed, to lift me out of the despondent gloom into which Harry's mad adventure had plunged me.

"You, M. Sabine," said he, as we were sitting at dessert on the second day after our envoys started for Rio, puffing and bibbing grief and anxiety away, or trying to do so, with more or less success, "you, M. Sabine, have once or twice expresssed a wish to hear how it was we escaped from that charnel house, Cayenne. As it may while away a few tedious hours, and besides that, fortify our souls by the remembrance and example of great perils successfully encountered, I will now run through the narrative briefly as possible, if you are disposed to listen."

I, of course, said I should feel much obliged, and M. de Veron set off at a canter without further prelude.

"The penal French settlement of Cayenne is, as you are aware, in the north-eastern corner of South America. It is planted on the northern and least swampy part of an island formed by a river of that name, swarming with caymans or crocodiles, which are most efficient sentinels

in guarding the pestiferous convict colony, forming as they do a reptile cordon around it, which, narrow as the river is, effectually prevents the escape of a prisoner by swimming. Desperate men have attempted it, and have every one, without exception, been devoured by the disgusting monsters. Spite of the horrible fate certain to overtake them, desperate men still, though not often, recklessly attempt to swim across the river. It is insanity, no doubt ; but what will not men maddened by hateful life attempt ?"

"All Cayenne prisoners," said Jules Penard, "are desperate men, till the pestiferous climate, exhausting toil under a tropical sun, and coarse, insufficient food, have broken them down in body and mind. That is a work very speedily accomplished—about four years being the average span of existence for a young and vigorous man."

"Before, however, more particularly describing the *agrémens* of the colony," resumed M. de Veron, "it will be well to relate how it came to pass that we were packed off thither.

"We had ourselves alone to blame for it. That is positive. I had a charming place about three miles out of Paris—*Mon Séjour*, my immediate ancestor has named it—I had a sufficient fortune, an admirable wife, an amiable, affectionate daughter. *Sacrebleu !* what more did I want ? Why could not I, and Penard here—who proved himself to be as egregious an ass as myself, in fact, many people gave him the preference in that respect, and I think they were right—why, I say, could not we have been content, have eaten, drunk, slept, amused ourselves, without troubling our empty heads about constitutions, republics, liberty, devil's own

conundrums, sure to bring their students sooner or later to trouble?"

"You must not take what Monsieur says, *au pied de la lettre*," remarked Penard. "He is in his heart as great an admirer of free, liberty-assuring constitutions as you Englishmen are."

"*Morbleu!* don't I say so—didn't I observe that that asinine admiration it was which finally landed me in Cayenne? Yes," continued M. de Veron, "instead of Penard and myself remaining quietly at home—he had as pretty a place as myself, a wife, too, whom he tenderly loved, and *three* darling children, which, I think, justifies me in asserting that he was yet a greater idiot than myself—instead, I say, of remaining quietly at home, basking in domestic sunshine, we must, forsooth, plunge into the stormy whirlpool of politics, make ourselves conspicuous, by vociferous applause at the theatres, of any striking passage of Corneille's or other great dramatists, denunciative of tyrants, bawl ourselves hoarse at public meetings for liberty, equality, fraternity—just as if I or Penard could ever have seriously intended to really fraternise with cobblers and costermongers, and exchange *Mon Séjour* and *Le Bocage*—Penard's place—for a carpenter's den in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, or a peasant's two-roomed white-washed *chaumière*, destitute of flooring. Folly all that!"

"Folly, no doubt," said Penard, "as you put it, but you always, when the humour is on you, fly off into absurd exaggerations."

"Tell the story yourself, or let me tell it my own way. Our simplicity," continued M. de Veron, "matched well with our moral and political blindness. We positively—you can't deny it, Penard—got it into our thick dunder-

heads, that a Bonaparte, though he might not be very securely bound by the solemnity of oaths to maintain the Republic one and indivisible, would never think of swamping it in the blood of the people who had raised him from the gutter to greatness.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* did not the 2d of December, 1851, disillusion us! Would that had been all it did! Penard and I had assisted at a wedding on the previous day, and slept in Paris.

"Awakened next morning by the *coup d'état* thunder-stroke, we were demented enough to rush off to a gun-shop kept by one Bisson, to whom we had been excellent customers, secure two rifles with ammunition, rush back into the street, help a lot of rough looking fellows to over-turn an omnibus, and commence constructing a barricade; which operation was suddenly as conclusively interrupted by a charge of cuirassiers. I have no recollection of the particular incidents, a general impression only, of the delightful *mèlée* which ensued. I certainly was knocked over by something and somebody, dragged out from under a small heap of bleeding bodies by my friend, Penard; and half blinded, smothered with blood and mire, hurried away by him, hatless, gunless, in torn-coatedness, to the house of an intimate friend, who, with much reluctance, allowed us to wash, lent me an old coat, and begged us to be off home with all possible speed.

"We had both been knocked into a frame of mind capable of appreciating that advice, and, five or six hours afterwards, were recovering our equanimity under the soothing influence of an excellent dinner at *Mon Séjour*, when the measured tramp of armed men, marching along the stone passage, caused a sudden, simultaneous halt in

the genial movements that, for the moment, engrossed our attention, and caused us to turn with apprehensive eye and suspended knives and forks towards the door, which, imperiously flung back, disclosed an officer of gendarmerie with about a dozen privates of that distinguished service at his back.

“By the officer’s side was that villain of a gunmaker, Bisson. Finding himself compromised, as we afterwards knew, by the discovery amongst the captured arms of the insurgents, of a number of new guns with his name upon them, he had made a declaration that he had been forcibly despoiled of them by the rioters, amongst the foremost of whom were those two well-known Red Republicans and brothers-in-law, Messieurs de Veron and Penard, of *Mon Séjour* and *Le Bocage*.

“Order, of course, for our immediate arrest—Bisson to accompany the officer charged with the execution of the *mandat d’arrêt*, for the purpose of identifying the Republican rioters.”

“Republican rioters!” I remarked. “Why, surely France was a Republic on the memorable day you speak of; the Man of the 2d of December its President !”

“*Tut*, what signified that? A *coup d’etat* reasons only with bayonets and cannon. Its irrefragable logic is success.

“Useless of course to remonstrate,” continued M. de Veron, with unabating volubility. “Quick! *La force armée* does not permit itself to be argued with. We must be off at once to the prison Mazas, long since made ready for such constitutional *canaille*, and there, in a very brief space of time, were I and Penard securely shut up with a crowd of fellow-fools and dupes. The illustrious President of the Republic had indeed triumphantly

trampled out Republicanism! Fortunate Louis Napoleon! *Le neveu de son oncle* had eclipsed the great doings of that uncle on the 18th *Brumaire*!"

"Call no man fortunate till he is dead, and a reverse can no longer befall him," interrupted calmer M. Penard. "It is quite possible that the poisoned chalice which the Prince-President on that bloody day pressed to the lips of panic-stricken Paris, an *Idée Napoleonienne* which, none can doubt, was germinating in his felon-soul at the very moment he was swearing on the gospels fidelity to the constitution, may one day be commended to his own."

"That may or may not come to pass," said M. de Veron "I do not profess to prophecy. The triumphant master of the situation did not condescend to put us through any form of trial," he went on to say, "but trundled us off the very next day, with about sixty others, the prison being inconveniently crowded, to Brest, thence in the *Calypso* frigate to one of the mouths of the Orinoco river, debouching in the Caribbean sea, where we disembarked, and were driven in chain-gangs to Crocodile or Cayenne island."

"Not, Monsieur Sabine," said Jules Penard, "not such chain-gangs as those of common convicts sent from Paris or other assize towns in the charge of Gardes Chiourne. We were to be spared that indignity, by order of the President, the round-bellied, beady-eyed chaplain of the *Calypso* informed us; at least, it was to be modified by the heavenly grace and favour of the Ruler of France. We were to march two and two, manacled in couples, and there was no absolute objection—the officer in command of the escort rather plumed himself upon an extreme benevolence of disposition—to two friends being manacled, *married* they termed it, to each other. M. de Veron and I

were consequently rivetted together by a blacksmith, as young runaway couples, I have read, used to be in England, at Gretna Green."

"The mention of that terrible journey through those wild forest-fastnesses to French Guiana," said M. de Veron, relapsing, with true French mutability, into sadness, "always brings to memory, the afflicting episode of the two Le Blanes, father and son.

"Pierre le Blane, and his son Henri, a delicate lad," continued he, "were, unlike Penard and myself, perfectly innocent of politics, caring no more about Princelets or Presidents, Cæsars or Kaisers, than for the lost tribes of Israel. Pierre was an honest, hard-working cabinet-maker, and was bringing up his son, who could not be more than sixteen or seventeen, and as I have said, a slight, delicate youth, to the same business. Pierre was a widower, and slept, boarded with his son, at a public-house in the Faubourg Saint Antoine. On the evening of the day of the *coup d'etat* they returned to their home very early, and, not caring to mingle or hold discourse with the excited people frequenting the house, went to bed immediately. Three fellow workmen slept in the same room. These came home late, and furtively, two of them being slightly wounded. They had not been in bed five minutes when a posse of gendarmes and sergents de ville burst into the chamber, carried off the whole five inmates to prison ; and without a word vouchsafed to them as to the why and wherefore, Pierre and Henri le Blane were posted off with the rest of us to Brest and put on board the *Calypso*.

"Well, the father and son, with the gracious permission of the benevolent minded commanding officer of the escort, were 'married' together for the journey with well-rivetted

fetters, on no pretence to be removed till we were all safe in Cayenne.

"I think we must have got over about half the distance," continued M. de Veron, "and had squatted for half-an-hour's rest at noon, at about half-a-mile's distance from the mosquito-swarming, pestiferous shores of the Orinoco."

"The Rio Negro," corrected Penard, "an affluent of the Orinoco. The incident you are about to relate could not, I believe, have occurred in the Orinoco, the reptilia infesting its waters not attaining, Humboldt says, the enormous size they do in the Rio Negro."

"Perhaps you are right," said M. de Veron, "but Negro or Orinoco this was what happened. The cayman or alligator of the region, I must premise, falls, during the great heats of summer, into a state of torpor, *estivation* is the French term, and remains buried in the muddy swamps or morasses; the slime and mud that had closed over him gradually becoming dried up, baked by the sun. With the rapid fecundity of South American vegetation, plants and flowers spring up in that pregnant soil in such rank luxuriance, that water-fowl, flamingoes, and other birds build their nest in it. When the autumnal rains fall, the cayman awakes from his summer sleep, uplifts the thickly planted soil and makes for the river, carrying on his back an island of flowers and rank vegetation. If attacked whilst so burdened, he dives at once, thus ridding himself both of his load and pursuers."

"A very extraordinary phenomenon," I remarked.

"Yes, and not more extraordinary than true, as our own eyes can vouch for. We were, as I was saying," continued M. de Veron, "resting ourselves for a short time, when, at not more than twenty yards from where we and the two Le Blanes were sitting, we observed a sudden up-

lifting of a portion of the soil, and presently up and out came an enormous cayman, making at once for the river.

"Most of us started up at witnessing such a remarkable occurrence, and followed to the river's edge, the more closely to observe it. This we were the more eager to do, as there was a boat with three or four men in it not far off, who, we thought, might probably attack the monster.

"They did not, however, and we continued to gaze on the flower island floating on, till a bend of the river hid it from our view.

"The harsh voice of one of the escort summoned us to fall into rank and recommence our march. We were about to obey when a piercing scream from Henri le Blane arrested our steps. The poor lad had been for some days obliged to cast off his worn out shoes, more correctly they had dropped off, and as they could not be replaced till we reached Cayenne, he had been compelled, like his father and several others, to walk through the stony, thorny forest with naked, bleeding feet. The cause of his screams was soon explained, one of the deadly brown snakes, so often found on the swampy shores of the Negro and other South American rivers, had, attracted perhaps by the trickling blood, bitten the unfortunate lad severely on the right foot. Having no medical appliances with us, we knew at once that his death was certain, and could not be long delayed.

"The grief, distraction of the father was terrible to witness. He refused to have the rivets chaining him to his boy filed away, and staggered along, when the march was resumed, with the fast-sinking lad momently becoming paler, colder, clasped in his eager arms, and with his burning, tearless eyes fixed in hopeless despair upon the pale, cold face.

"Brandy had been forced down Henri's throat, but it availed nothing ; and after toiling along, piteously refusing help, for about half an hour, the father sank down with the dead boy in his arms.

"The commandant rode up and ordered the heads of the fetter-rivets to be filed away. I and Penard were standing close by.

"'It is scarcely worth while,' I said, 'to trouble your farrier. The father is dying. One grave will serve for both.'

"Pierre le Blane lifted his darkening eyes to mine and to Penard's. We had endeavoured to render him any little services in our power.

"'Yes,' he bitterly murmured, 'dying, as you say ; murdered like my poor boy, not by the reptile on the river-shore, but by the serpent of the Seine.'

"'Vengeance is mine !' interposed Penard who is of a more religious turn of mind than I am, and holding a crucifix before the sufferer, 'Vengeance is mine ! has declared the Lord of Heaven and Earth. I will repay.' When Penard had ceased speaking Pierre le Blane was dead.

"This painful incident," continued M. de Veron, "affected us sensibly, but the impression was not lasting as it would have been if witnessed in the quietude of gentle, social life. We seemed to breathe an atmosphere of cruelty and wrong—cruelty and wrong openly flaunting themselves in the face of God, and finding no check. In truth," added M. de Veron, "I began to feel serious misgivings as to the soundness of the moral maxims I had heard delivered in churches, finding, as I did, that even the orthodox expounders of the Divine Message once delivered in Judea, practically recognised violence and homicide to

be powers legitimately governing the earth, upon one sole condition that they were strong enough to triumphantly fulfil their infernal mission."

"That is not quite an original idea of yours, M. de Veron," I remarked. "The teaching of our English philosopher, Mr. Thomas Carlyle, is essentially based upon it. But let us get to Cayenne and back again quickly as possible."

"Very well. To continue then. But permit me for a moment to remark, as a proof of the absurd tenacity with which childish ideas cling to one, that I really imagined for a moment we should halt for some ten minutes to give Le Blane and his son Christian burial. Not technically Christian, but decent solemn burial, which must mean the same thing, as it cannot for example, be contended, I suppose, that Christian men and women drowned at sea have not Christian burial, that the ocean is not for them a consecrated burial place, though no Bishop had specifically blessed that particular spot in the waste of waters, and their only requiem was the howling wind, the dash and roar of the engulphing waves!"

"Ah ça!" M. de Veron, my friend, don't begin preaching," said Penard. "If you do, we shall never reach the French penal settlement. The answer of the commandant to your appeal was direct, conclusive. 'We have neither a pick nor a spade.' Certainly we might have scratched a hole sufficiently capacious in the shore sands to hold both corpses, but *cui bono?* In that case they would quickly have been disinterred and devoured by alligators. As it was, the jaguars, no doubt, had them within a very brief time after we left the spot. Well! what can one say? Marching in convict couples through South American forests to Cayenne is not, holy blue! like walking arm-in-arm with your wife or daughter along

the Boulevard des Italiens on your way to the theatre. You must quietly accept the situation with its accidents, if you cannot help yourselves. Now, let us be off again."

"We at last reached," continued M. de Veron, "the plantation known as La Gabrielle. What *farceur* was it, I wonder, gave the name of the much be-rhymed mistress of Henri Quatre to the detestable place? La Gabrielle is situated on the continent, at no very great distance from the Island of Cayenne, and divided from it by the Crocodile River.

"They cultivate coffee and pepper at La Gabrielle, and it is used as a sanatorium for the soldiers of the unfortunate regiment doing duty at the penal settlement.

"We remained at La Gabrielle a few days only; were then boated off to Cayenne proper, and our fetters being removed, we were barracked in wretched huts constructed of bamboos and slime mud, and swarming with mosquitoes and fleas of every abominable variety. We had each a blanket, and we lay on reed mats, but not, mark well, till we had acquired sufficient skill to weave them ourselves. Till then the foul vermin-teeming ground was our bed. Then the provisions—the sour black bread—the—ah, I shall not talk about it. The art of inflicting misery, slow, wearing torture, is cultivated in Cayenne with great skill; the rack kept constantly on the stretch by the extremest degree of tension compatible with human endurance. I should just like to have the saviour of society, Monsieur Bonaparte, under Le Bossu's supervision at Cayenne for, say, a couple of days. That would quite sufficiently glut my revenge."

"Tut, tut!" interrupted Penard. "We have promised to inform these gentlemen how we escaped from Cayenne,

and you are plunging again into the maelstrom of European politics."

"It was very horrible," continued Penard, after a pause, M. de Veron having resumed his pipe and posed himself, as one who should say 'tell the story yourself, I have done,' "it was very horrible, but that which was fast breaking us down mind and body, was not so much the filthy hovels in which we were cribbed up at night, the exhausting daily toil in the fields beneath a scorching sun, the scanty disgusting food doled out to us, as the ever present despairing thought, the dull, leaden consciousness that we were doomed to drag out a wretched life to the last dregs, in the hellish settlement from which there could be no escape save through the gate of death. As at Dante's Inferno, there is inscribed over the portal of Cayenne by the demon finger of an inexorable fate, 'Here hope never enters.' "

"We have given that demon fate the lie," murmured M. de Veron, "but at what cost!"

"The hunchback," continued Penard, "of whom Monsieur has spoken, and whom we knew only as Le Bossu, was an especial favourite of the commandant or governor, a crazy old *vieille-moustache*, whose maudlin brain seemed divided into two hemispheres, one utterly rusted, and only responsive to babblings about Bonaparte, Marengo, Austerlitz, and the like glittering cheats by which France has been dazzled, blinded, enslaved. The other hemispheric moiety was absorbed by drink and dominoes, at which pastimes of a drivelling dotage, Le Bossu was his prompter and associate, and in so ministering to the commandant's foibles, became the virtual depositary of his power. Practically, Le Bossu was supreme over all the unfortunates imprisoned in Cayenne. Whatever accus-

ation he made was held to be proved, any punishment he suggested was certain to be carried into effect.

"De Veron and myself early acquired Le Bossu's especial dislike; why, we knew not, except, perhaps, that our looks had at times too vividly testified our abhorrence of his conduct. We were, in consequence, subjected to such petty, continuous, merciless indignities that existence was fast becoming insupportable, when light broke with a lightning flash from out the dark canopy of clouds.

"I must premise," continued Penard, "that the only access to the mainland from the Island of Cayenne was by some half-dozen Government boats, which, when not in use, were hauled up on shore, chained together, and sentinelled both night and day. The oars and rudders were also taken away and deposited in an outbuilding of the Government House.

"There was, however, another communication between the mainland and the island, in the hands of Carib Indians. These people trade with the garrison, bringing with them, from the European stations on the rivers, articles of clothing and luxury, which they exchange for the products of Cayenne.

"They are allowed at each visit to stay but a brief time only, and their canoe-boats—these are a sort of hybrid between an European boat and an Indian cockleshell, or canoe—must pass, on returning to the mainland, before a certain point where there is a coast-guard station, in order that it may be seen the canoe-boat contains only Caribs.

"These Caribs dress, if the term may be used, in a very peculiar manner. They wear a kind of coarse petticoat, and generally, not always, indulge in moccasins, but, observing them at a distance, you fancy they are

clothed in a sort of European fashion from head to foot. They paint sailors', soldiers' jackets, waistcoats, leggings, &c., upon themselves, and so cleverly that, at a distance, I repeat, you would fancy they were sailors or soldiers.

“One day,” went on Penard—“one evening, I should say—when M. de Veron and I were being driven to hut with our fellow slaves, a tall Carib, painted as a French soldier, and apparently drunk—an Indian weakness which the authorities, for various reasons, encourage—stumbled against or rather jostled me. I remonstrated, the Carib apologised, stretched out his hand in drunken fellowship, clasped mine, and left a sealed note in it, placing, as he did so, a finger on his lip.

“Heavens! the electric shock the touch of that piece of paper gave me! Was it possible that we were in communication with the outer world, with civilised society? My hurried whisper to Monsieur excited in him the like agitation. Should we never reach our hut, be alone—able to read the precious missive! At last we were able to do so. It was from Madame de Veron, who, as you already know, had come out with her daughter to Cayenne in the hope of effecting her husband’s liberation.”

“Would,” sighed M. de Veron, “would she had left the husband to perish in the swamps of Cayenne rather than have redeemed his life by the sacrifice of her own. Alas, alas! The ways of God are strange, mysterious, inexplicable!”

“Madame de Veron,” resumed Penard, “had reached so far as Father Rocea’s missionary station on the Orinoco, and there she would, with Louise, remain till, with the help of Zulu, a faithful Carib, as Father Rocea vouches, we joined them. You have, perhaps, never heard of those

Christian mission stations on the South American river-shores?"

I explained that we had, Dr. Kirwan having given us a full description of that established by Father Zenos on the Amazon.

"You will easily understand, then," continued Penard, "that Madame de Veron and her daughter were most kindly received and sheltered by Father Rocca, and that his best assistance and advice were given as to how she should proceed to effect the deliverance of her husband and myself. A well-nigh hopeless task, the Padre warned her, but the effort should be strenuously made.

"Zulu, the Carib who had been selected to carry out the plan of deliverance, entered heartily into the enterprise. He had done business at Cayenne for a long time, was well known there, and had never incurred the slightest suspicion of having any feeling but that of scornful derision for the wretched prisoners.

"Nor had he, though a good fellow enough—for a Carib. It was the recompense promised by Madame de Veron which tempted Zulu, who was a kind of semi-civilised savage. His Carib instincts had not been destroyed by the Christian teaching of Father Rocca, but there had grown over them a sort of surface-fungus civilisation. He not only delighted in the 'strong waters' of the whites—that was of course—but loved to frequent the cities and indulge in all other coarse vices which, in South America, abound therein.

"These tastes were, to him, expensive, and Zulu would encounter almost any risk to obtain the means of gratifying them. He delighted especially, as we afterwards knew, in scrubbing himself clear of paint and strutting about in European costume, firmly believing that it was

difficult, when so decked out, to distinguish him from a sun-tanned Portuguese.

" He was a shrewd fellow too—cunning as a fox, lissome, smooth, slippery as a serpent—his bite, when provoked, as venomous.

" Zulu quickly familiarised us with the plan of escape he had resolved upon. In the first place, he was desirous that we should make up a party of nine or ten well-armed, determined men. The reason of this was, that, before we could reach Father Rocca's, we should be sure to meet with hostile Indians, who would probably endeavour to capture and carry us back to Cayenne, for the sake of the recompense which such an exploit would assure for them. They would, however, hesitate to attack any considerable number of well-armed whites. This condition was easily fulfilled, and we arranged with seven companions in captivity, to risk with us the desperate venture ; death—certain, swift—being, as we all knew, the penalty to be exacted for any attempt at escape.

" Zulu had provided rifles, pistols, horses, which he had left in the forest at about a mile off in charge of a young Carib, whom Madame de Veron was also to largely reward.

" The fifteenth of August, the Napoleon *fête* day, was near at hand ; and after attending mass, the convicts would, in honour of the great soldier's memory, be allowed to rest from their labour during the remainder of the day.

" Our rendezvous was a ravine at the northern end of the island, near which Zulu's boat would be moored, in readiness to take us off in broad daylight.

" We sought the rendezvous singly, and all having arrived without being observed, as we believed, we

stripped, and Zulu, who was assisted by the sharp Carib youngster, at once began to paint us Carib fashion. At least two terrible hours had passed before we had completed our toilette—including, of course, feathered and beaded head-dresses. The hideous, grotesque-looking wretches that we were when all was done! Peal after peal of irrepressible laughter, much to Zulu's annoyance, burst from us as we gazed at each other.

"Zulu had reason to be annoyed, alarmed. There was presently a shrieking echo of our laughter, the mocking merriment of a triumphant demon, and, looking upwards, we saw the fiend-face of Le Bossu peering over the edge of the precipitous ravine, and flaming with exultant ferocity.

"Thousand thunders! wasn't that a heart-quake for us all! It was all over! Nothing could be more certain than that we were doomed; and there was nothing for it but to meet the fate we had challenged as bravely as we might.

"Looking round, I missed the Carib boy. 'He is gone,' said Zulu, gloomily, in his broken French, 'to try and stop Le Bossu. He is very active, and climbed up the ravine. I could not have done it. He has arrows—poisoned arrows. He is swift, bold, cunning. We shall see. Come!'

"So saying, Zulu led the way, at his best speed, out of the ravine. Having cleared it, we saw Le Bossu walking swiftly away towards head-quarters. No one else was in sight, not even the Carib boy.

"We did not see him, but Zulu divined his whereabouts instinctively. I must explain," said Penard, "that both Zulu and the lad had observed Le Bossu peering over the declivity some minutes before we did,

and the lad, Pedro—this was the baptismal name conferred by Father Roecca—had at once started off.

“‘Pedro,’ said Zulu, a red sinister light swarthy illuminating his Carib features, ‘Pedro is behind the palms yonder, close to which Le Bossu must pass. Ha, ha !’ he growled with a savage chuckle, ‘Pedro may save us yet !’

“Le Bossu was passing the palm trees, when a poisoned arrow shot from a blow-pipe, such as that belonging to your Felicee, glanced out from behind the belt of foliage and struck Le Bossu in the face.

“With a cry, a yell of rage, Le Bossu drew one of the revolvers, which he was never without, from his belt, and darted round the trees in hot chase of his assailant.

“He had not the slightest chance to succeed in catching Pedro, nor to use his pistol with effect. The Carib lad curled round and round the clump of trees—I know not what word would better describe his agile movement—discharging arrow after arrow at his pursuer, several of which struck Le Bossu, staining his shirt—he wore no other upper clothing—with large spots of blood.

“The action of the poison,” continued Penard, “was no doubt accelerated by the violent motion of Le Bossu. His pace slackened ; and first staggering like a drunken man, vainly endeavouring to catch at one of the palms for support, he fell forward on his face, motionless, and, as we thought, dead.

“We all ran up. Zulu drew a hunting-knife from his wampum belt. ‘I must kill him quick,’ he said ; ‘we have not one moment too much time !’”

“Yes,” interposed M. de Veron, “and we must stupidly interpose to save the miscreant’s life. Had we not done so—— Ah ! go on with the story.”

"We objected to Zulu killing Le Bossu in cold blood, if, indeed, he were not already dead, which we could hardly doubt. 'No, no,' said Zulu, 'not dead. Curare poison kill birds, not men. Le Bossu has fainted; that is all. In two, perhaps one hour, he shall be well again. Better, safer kill him!'

"We could not consent to such a deed, and Zulu, in great discontent, finding us determined, dragged the insensible body into the midst of the palms, and led the way to the boat.

"We quickly and quietly embarked, and cast off, Zulu and the Carib lad rowing. We had, as before explained, to pass near a military post before striking across the river to the only landing place on the mainland.

"We needed not, it was not *de rigueur* that we should pass at a less distance than about two hundred yards, but to our astonishment, and speaking for myself, intense dismay, Zulu pulled direct, stem out for the jutting point of the island occupied by the military post.

"Holy blue! and wasn't that a nervous moment! Zulu, despairing of escape, had, at the last moment, made up his mind to save himself by denouncing us. How else interpret his present action?

"Ass—fool that I was," went on the excited speaker, "it was the cunningest device ever conceived by Carib brain to dispel suspicion. When within about five or six paddles' length of the guard, the motion of the boat was stayed, and Zulu, rising to his feet, hailed the sentinel:—

"'He, Zulu, had not been able to find Monsieur le Sécrétaire du Gouverneur—this was Le Bossu's official designation—and would he, the sentinel, have the kindness to inform M. le Sécrétaire, that he, Zulu, should be

certain to return in two or three days and bring with him the tobacco and brandy, ordered by M. le Sécrétaire. With a little for yourself, M. le Sentinelle,' added the Carib in a lower but quite distinct tone. '*Bon!*' said the soldier, nodding and grinning, 'I shall inform M. le Sécrétaire.'

"The boat was now urged," continued Penard, "directly across the river, and we were fast nearing the landing place, when the Gouvernor-commandant, with half-a-dozen French officers, from La Gabrielle, suddenly emerged from the immediately contiguous forest, and came down to the edge of the river.

"It was assuredly all over with us now, beyond all possibility of escape ; and yet, thunder of heaven ! those imperturbable Caribs kept unwaveringly on, and would, in a few minutes, land us directly in the midst of the Commandant and his staff !

"Not so. The Caribs who were rowing saw, as we could not, sitting as we did with our faces towards the mainland, that a Government boat was pulling across the river to embark the General and his officers. When, therefore, we were still some distance from the shore, the motion of our skiff was checked, and it was pulled aside, out of the way of the Government boat, as deferential usage in such a case would direct.

"The French officers did not honour us with the slightest notice, and the moment the prow of the boat grazed the shore, embarked in her, and sped across the river. We, under Zulu's guidance, landed deliberately, assisted to draw up the canoc-boat high and dry, and walked leisurely on in Indian file till we were within the fastness of the forest.

"The sudden relief, the instant lightening of the load,

almost overcame me ! I staggered like one in drink, so did others, and but for a draught of spirits, considerably provided by Zulu, I have no doubt several amongst us would have fainted outright.

“The reaction it will be readily understood was tremendous.

“We hastened on, guided through the pathless wilderness with unhesitating certainty, by our Carib friends.

“Arrived at the spot where Zulu had left the horses, rifles, &c., we found all safe. There was wine too, and preserved meats, biscuits, delicious fare to which we had so long been strangers, and very heartily we enjoyed it.”

“Yes,” said M. de Veron, “and how valiant we felt after that capital dinner, topped with excellent wine, and each holding a loaded rifle in his grasp ! You, Penard, Bélenger, and Réval voted, I well remember, to bivouac on the spot, repose ourselves till the morrow’s dawn ; and only that the Carib had more sense than you, Cayenne would have received us back again, and we should probably have been hanged—*sus. per. col.* They would not have conferred upon us the honour of military execution, when the dawn broke on the world.”

“I had forgotten Le Bossu,” said Penard ; “Zulu had not, and insisted upon our mounting at once and placing as great a width of tangled wilderness between us, and the party of pursuers whom Le Bossu would be sure to lead with the energy of a blood-hound, before they could have struck our trail.

“On we went, unresting, except at intervals, then more for the sake of the horses than our own, and for three days and nights no adventure or misadventure befel us.”

“The fourth day made amends,” said M. de Veron.

"Yes, and you, Monsieur, began the game. It was absolutely necessary," continued Penard, "to rest the horses, and a halt was called at about noon. We should start again in the evening, after the moon, which was at the full, had risen. Just as——"

"I beg pardon, messieurs," interrupted Gotlieb, junior, "but supper will be served in a few minutes, and it will be as well, perhaps, to postpone the fourth days haps or mishaps, till that always interesting business is disposed of."

The good sense of this suggestion of Gotlieb the younger was indisputable; it was unanimously agreed to, and we forthwith adjourned.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PURSUIT.

NEITHER of us was inclined for bed, and our French friends were invited to continue the escape from Cayenne.

"We had rested," said M. de Veron, "for about an hour; but rest, remaining in one place, pausing on our route to Father Rocca's mission-station, was for me insufferable. Motion, activity of some kind, was indispensable, and, taking my rifle, I left my companions, not one of whom was disposed to accompany me, for half-an-hour or an hour's stroll.

"I had the good sense, which, upon reflection, rather surprised me, to take the bearings of our temporary bivouac; and as, amongst other forest requisites, Zulu had the foresight to provide several pocket compasses, there was little danger of losing my way in the wilderness, which just about there was narrow, but sparsely wooded.

"The mountain range of the Andes, as we all know, is, as it were, the backbone of South America, running well-nigh entirely through it, and irregularly dividing the continent into West and East America.

"The torrent-like rains or floods have scooped out immense fissures in that mountain range, adown which sweeps, during those floods, a mass of *débris*, in which diamonds, rubies, and other precious stones are sometimes found.

"Sauntering along in the sultry stillness of the wild solitude, I came to the brink of one of these scooped-out

fissures. It might be about twenty feet deep, half as many in width, and the jagged sides or walls were nearly precipitous. Peering curiously at the mass of débris heaped up here and there in little hillocks, I perceived a shining substance, a glittering point, embedded in one of them, which might be, it occurred to me, a valuable stone of some kind.

"There could, at all events, be no harm in obtaining a clearer view of it; so I laid down my rifle, and there being a splendid bamboo-tree close at hand, I soon supplied myself with a long rod with which I should be able to reach, dig it out of the heap, and be the better able to judge if it were likely to reward the trouble of announcing the discovery, and getting young Pedro, who could climb like a cat, to descend into the ravine and secure it.

"My bamboo-rod, or wand, did not prove to be of quite sufficient length, and, to reach the shining substance, I was compelled, lying face downwards, to stretch myself over the edge of the precipice, to the extent of almost losing my balance.

"I was just within reach, the end of the bamboo-rod touched the supposed precious stone when, *Sacre bleu!* over I toppled, not stopping till, bruised and bleeding, I found myself at the bottom.

"Looking upwards, directly I had pulled myself together, the cause of my unlooked for descent was immediately apparent. An enormous spotted tiger, jaguar you call them, was glaring down at me with its green, fiery eyes, and lashing its tail furiously, with, no doubt, savage self-reproach at having, by its own thoughtlessness, postponed, if it had not hopelessly lost, its supper.

"The animal must have stealthily approached, with cat-like step, whilst I lay stretched out over the precipice

and, instead of transfixing me with its terrible claws, as a judicious jaguar should, had—I could remember the gentle pressure—poked enquiringly at my carcass, and, so doing, sent me over the precipice !

“The situation,” continued M. de Veron, “was an unlucky one for both of us. The tiger could not come down after me, and I assuredly could not venture, availing myself of projecting points of rock, and of a species of coarse, strongly-rooted *lichen*, growing here and there out of cracks in the craggy surface, to ascend to it, both my rifle and knife having been laid aside when I projected myself over the ravine.

“What was to be done, I knew not, except to halloo with all my might. I did so, but no human echo responded ; and the tiger’s growling roar seemed, by its lack of energy, to mock my foolish attempt at summoning assistance.

“Certainly my friends would not proceed till after exhausting every expedient for discovering my whereabouts. True, but I remembered having been full an hour deviously wandering about ; and to be kept prisoner by that ferocious beast down in a dark abyss, even for one night, would not be pleasant. There was no hope that the jaguar would abandon his watch. Those animals never do ; and no doubt it would soon have company, its consort first, probably ; and who should guarantee me that a huge boa, attracted from motives of curiosity, might not slide in an appearance, and, perceiving how matters stood, slip down the sides of the ravine, and fold me in its ardent embrace ! Terrible fancies, I can assure you, are apt to crowd upon a man, unarmed, and in the custody—*gardé à vue*—of a hungry tiger, in a South American forest, with night coming on.

“But it was not a fancy of mine that the tiger became

suddenly roused, excited to an extraordinary degree. Not that it had suddenly discovered some mode of reaching me. Certainly not. Its tail raised vertically like a bar of iron, as if stiffened by eleetric force, and beating the air in sympathy with the beast's fierce growlings, was turned towards me ; its fury being directed towards some other prey or assailant that I could not see.

"One or more of my friends possibly ; yet that could hardly be, or the sharp crack of a rifle would quickly have been heard. Presently the tiger, whose arched back had for several minutes indicated that it was about to take its deadly spring, leapt through the air with a terrific roar, and the fierce confused sounds of a death struggle between two wild beasts were plainly heard.

"I had not a moment to lose, and with great effort I managed to clamber up the declivity. Arrived at the top, my first impulse was to seize my rifle. Armed with that, I looked around, and was witness of a savage combat—a combat *à l'outrance*—between the jaguar and the terrible ant-eater of those regions."

"I have never seen an ant-eater," remarked M. Gotlieb, "but I know that without them there are some parts of this continent that would be over-run by multitudes of 'foraging ants,' as they are called, of both the black and red varieties. These march in armies, and though of great use as scavengers, vermin killers, would be insupportable but for their natural enemy, the ant-eater, who keeps down their numbers to an endurable amount."

"True," said Penard. "The ant-eater is a terrible foe to those industrious, provident creatures whom the Wise King bade man observe and imitate. His approach to one of their mound cities—a mound being often two or three feet in diameter, in which they have stored up food

against the wet days whercin no ant can work—is the signal and advent of utter desolation. Resistance is useless. He makes breaches, scatters their sand-defences with his terrible snout, and not only devours the stored-up food, but the ants themselves by myriads."

"That charming excerpt from Buffon's or some one else's natural history finished," said M. de Veron, "you will, perhaps, allow me to proceed. The combat between an ant-eater and a jaguar is, I believe, almost invariably fatal to both. The tiger seizes and tears the ant-eater, and that animal, despairing of its own life, plunges its claws into the tiger's belly and sides, rips it up, and they expire locked together in death. They are generally found in that condition, unless, indeed, one or more jaguars come in at the death, and feast off the ready repast, compounded of tiger and ant-eater. That also must often happen.

"Such was, I can testify, the end of the duello I witnessed between the jaguar and ant-eater. I did not pause to contemplate the defunct combatants too curiously ; being anxious to rejoin my friends, and at a loss how to easily do so ; as in the tumble down, for which I was indebted to the jaguar, I had lost my pocket compass. I may mention, by the way, that such was the state of obfuscation to which that descnnt reduced me, that I totally forgot all about the precious stone, the dclusive brightness of which—a common case—had lured me into, what for a time seemed, mortal peril.

"The compass was gone and I had to find my way to the bivouac as I best could. I strode straight on, and it was not long before human voices, speaking in French, as I presently found, proved that I had luckily taken the right direction.

"When within about twenty paces as I judged of the

speakers, I paused for a moment to listen ; the voices not being, or as I fancied so, familiar to me. That was not surprising, as our Cayenne companions were comparative strangers. I should, of course, have recognised Penard's voice, but he did not speak."

"Holy blue!" interrupted Penard, "it would have been strange if you had heard me speak seeing that——"

"One moment, Penard! Let me finish the story, if you please!"

"My hesitation was for a moment only," continued M. de Veron; "who could the French talkers be but our party? On I strode. The voices came from behind a thicket as I may call it of bamboo, twined, matted with orchidæ. As I closely neared it, a loud peal of laughter burst forth, and stepping briskly round the end of the thicket, exclaiming, 'I am rejoiced to find you so merry, my friends!' I found myself in the presence, almost in the arms of, four French soldiers of the Cayenne regiment, and that infernal Le Bossu.

"Which amongst us was most surprised I cannot of course be sure, but I think I could venture to say which was the most frightened. They were eating and drinking, seated on the grass. Le Bossu instantly sprang up with a yell of triumph, the others followed his example, and I shot off quite as fast, you may depend, as my nervous legs could carry me; the five following in hot, screaming pursuit.

"There was a thickly branched fig tree at no great distance. Could I gain the shelter of those branches I might hold my own till the report of my rifle and theirs, brought my friends to the rescue, there being but five pursuers, including Le Bossu, though possibly others might not be far off.

"My game must have beeu apparent to the soldiers, as several bullets whistled past, unpleasantly close, before I reached cover. I did so, nearly unharmed, with the loss only of a shred of my right ear, carried off by a bullet—you can see the mark—and, once in the tree, to hit me was almost impossible.

"They fired several harmless volleys into it, but I did not return their fire. At last, the young officer in command, a mere lad, ordered the men to scale the tree. The soldiers hesitated, which was not to be wondered at, the only access to the top of the tree-trunk being that up which I had clambered, and could only be ascended in single file. One rifle covered it, and the leader consequently exposed himself to certain death, if my nerves did not fail me, in terror of the immediate retribution that would, as they imagined, assuredly follow the death of a comrade.

"The young *sous-lieutenant* rated his men with a volley of fierce, manly oaths, and drawing his sword, commanded them to at least follow and avenge him if he fell.

"Before, however, dashing on in command of a forlorn hope, consisting mainly of his rash self, he, in a hard, haranguing voice, summoned the runaway *scélérat*, cowering behind the branches of the tree, to surrender, resistance being hopeless, and exemplary vengeance certain to follow any wanton shedding of blood, under such circumstances, by said *scélérat* or scoundrel.

"Notwithstanding," continued M. de Veron, "the young officer's abusive language, I should not have thought myself justified in taking his life or that of either of his men in mere wantonness—that is uselessness; but I knew, and they ought to have suspected, that my friends were near at hand, within the sound of rifle shot, which circum-

stance made all the difference between a legitimate and purposeless resistance.

"The *scélérat* returning no answer to his peremptory summons, the juvenile subaltern dashed towards the tree and began ascending it, two of his men immediately following, the other with Le Bossu, remaining some eight or ten paces off, covering the three climbers with their rifles, ready to shoot me down should I expose myself when firing upon the storming party.

"The subaltern's *kepi*, striking, as he climbed, against a branch of the tree, fell off, exposing the head and bright clustering locks of the fair-haired lad—he could not have been more than eighteen—and instinctively, as if with the sudden compunction of an intending murderer, my finger drew back from the trigger and I lowered the muzzle of my rifle, pointing directly at that youthful head, at but a few feet distance.

"By that nervous, involuntary action, I slightly exposed myself, and was instantly favoured with two rifle bullets by the covering party, one of which struck the fleshy part of my left thigh, inflicting a sharp painful, though not serious injury. It, however, effectually puffed away all puling sentiment. I fired, the unfortunate youth fell backwards with a scream of agony, toppling over the two soldiers immediately following.

"Quickly on their feet, and their hot French blood kindled to flame by the death of their youthful commander, they all, Le Bossu included, rushed forward with fierce yells, to scale the protecting tree at any hazard.

"At that critical moment, loud shouts struck upon their startled ears, and glancing round, they saw my armed companions hurrying up at a quicker pace than even the *pas de charge*.

"The sight was enough, and away they bolted, unpursued, and were quickly lost to view. My friends, naturally suspecting that the rifle volleys could only proceed in those solitary wilds from our soldier-pursuers, who, we did not doubt were following eagerly upon our track, and that the object of their attentions could be no other than my wandering self, had hurried, swiftly as possible, in the direction of the firing, but at first, and for a few minutes, had gone wrong.

"Mutual felicitations, of course. Regret for the fate of the young soldier, whom we remembered in Cayenne as one of the most urbane of the garrison officers, was warmly expressed.

"*Morbleu!* Had it been that accursed hunchback that had bit the dust, it would have been quite another matter. Well, his turn might come !

"Our reflections, lugubrious and congratulatory, were cut short by Zulu. 'No time for talk, monsieur !' he exclaimed. 'There are plenty more French soldiers not far off, we may be sure. Let us return at once to the bivouac, mount and be off. Not one moment must be lost, if we would save our necks.'

"This was obviously true. We complied in hot haste with the Carib's injunction, and in ten minutes, less, perhaps, we were again fleeing for our lives under Zulu's skilful guidance.

"Intermittent sounds of pursuit, the gallop of horses over exceptionally hard, resonant ground, were borne to us upon the wind which was blowing after us. The Carib's tactics were cunningly varied to suit the exigencies of the situation.

"Once he turned away—at a right angle from the direction we were pursuing—and led us over a long

stretch of elastic grass, short grass of a peculiar kind—upon which the hoofs of the horses left no trace, and made no sound. We had a short rest at the termination of that admirable savannah.

“Not many hours afterwards, during the night,” continued M. de Veron, “when, as we imagined, the pursuers must have been left far behind, the thunder of their horses’ hoofs broke upon us with a suddenness, which took our breath away. It did mine, I know. They, too, must have been previously galloping over one of those unechoing savannahs.

“*‘Halte!*” exclaimed the Carib, in an undertone. ‘*Halte!* Not a sound! not a word. Draw close in here,’ he added, gently walking his horse into the midst of a thick covert of trees. ‘Silence! They will go on without seeing us!’

“I do not know how many feverish minutes had thus passed—people do not keep accurate account of time under such circumstances; the clatter of the horses’ hoofs—the riders could not be less than twenty in number—sounded with each fleeting moment, nearer and nearer; and presently we could hear their fierce shouts of anticipated triumph, they evidently believing we were not far off, and ahead of them. They rode past in the bright moonlight at a furious pace, and Zulu drew a long breath of relief.

“‘It is well,’ he said. ‘Now we can rest ourselves and the horses in safety. Fools! We shall be at Father Rocca’s, Señor Veron,’ added the exulting Carib, ‘soon after break of day! We can have our suppers in peace. They will not come back to seek us.’

“Zulu and the young Pedro refreshed themselves with brandy—a liquor they had an especial liking, and a

capacity for, rarely witnessed—to their hearts' content. Their anxieties were over. They felt no doubt of safely reaching Father Rocca's Missionary Station, and with that their responsibility ceased, and the stipulated reward would be paid over to them. After that, Zulu made no secret of it, he must leave all to the care of the venerable Padre, and *le bon Dieu*.

"The knowledge of that fact did not trouble us. Once at the station, on the Orinoco, we confidently trusted to remain securely sheltered till a trading vessel passed, in which we could embark for some Atlantic port. That expectation was not shared by the Carib, but he took care not to openly express his adverse conviction.

"Again we were off, and, as Zulu promised, just as the first faint pencillings of dawn broke the darkness of the eastern horizon, the white painted spire of Father Rocca's chapel, shooting upwards from a pile of low buildings and partially concealing foliage, loomed in sight.

"A shout of irrepressible gladness burst from us; we put our horses to the gallop—the intervening space was cleared in a few minutes—and," added M. de Veron, his voice breaking into accents of passionate sorrow, "Adèle, my murdered wife—our Louise was in my arms."

"Calm yourself, Monsieur," said Penard. "It is folly to be constantly dwelling upon the irremediable past. Adèle is in Heaven, and if souls in bliss are, as some believe, conscious of what is passing on earth, concerning those they loved in the mortal state, she is now interceding, at this moment, that strength of mind be given thee to bear up manfully against the trials of a transitory life, if only for the sake of her child Louise.

"I will finish the story myself," continued Penard.

"Our reception by Father Rocca was a most kindly one, but he could hold out no hope of being able to shelter or conceal us from the hunters, not the slightest. On the contrary he earnestly advised us, no vessel being likely to touch at the station for some weeks, not to permit ourselves ~~one~~ hour's unnecessary delay; and it was finally settled that we should again set forward after a few hour's rest.

"A guide was indispensable, and we were endeavouring to bargain with reluctant Zulu for a continuation of his services, when Pedro rushed into the room, panting with haste, and half wild with fright.

"'The French soldiers!' he exclaimed. 'Quick—quick—your rifles! They are coming on fast! Quick! quick!'

"Pedro's startling announcement," continued Penard, "lifted us in a moment to our feet, and we gazed with blank dismay in each other's faces, till Zulu's anxious tones recalled us to ourselves.

"'Which way are they coming?' he hurriedly demanded of the lad. 'Have you seen them yourself?'

"The Carib boy said he had not himself seen them, but several negroes had. They were coming up on the right, galloping across the savannah.

"'Then,' shouted Zulu, 'they cannot yet have crossed the bridge. *Alerte, messieurs!*' he added, 'there is still a chance for us! But quick—never mind the rifles! This way!' and he darted into an adjoining tool and store apartment.

"'Each of you take one of these axes! Now follow me—quick! quick! Reverend Padre,' added the excited Indian, pausing a moment in his outrush, and addressing the pale, trembling missionary, 'have the ladders ready. We may some of us, please God, come back!'

"There were no French horse or foot soldiers in sight when we got outside, but Zulu sped on with frantic energy, we following, towards a branch, or creek I should say, of the Orinoco, distant some five or six hundred yards from the Mission House.

"A light bamboo bridge spanned the deep turbid water, which about there was infested with crocodiles, though not in large numbers. At about a quarter of an hour's walk further up, the rapidly shoaling creek was easily fordable; this we knew afterwards; but the pressing exigency at the moment, we quickly comprehended, was to cut away the bamboo bridge, a work that with our axes would not be difficult of accomplishment, if the rifles of the French soldiers, who, as we turned a screen or belt of trees, came directly in sight, did not mar the work.

"They, of course, saw us as soon as we did them, and spurred furiously forward, screaming and shouting with vengeful exultation, the hunchback leading.

"The crisis was a nervous one, but we held on with unabated speed, and reached the bamboo bridge or pontoon, whilst the horsemen were yet four or five hundred paces distant.

"Our axes were instantly at work, and it was evident that a few sharp blows would sever the holdings of the bridge on our side of the creek. Those blows were, after Zulu's example, dealt with a will amidst a shower of rifle bullets, badly aimed, almost necessarily so, our pursuers' firing from the saddle with their horses at full gallop. The frail, yet firmly knit structure fell off, but still held by the opposite fastenings swung round to the further bank.

"Our purpose happily achieved without accident, we

hurried back to cover. The soldiers would not dare to swim their horses across deep water, pretty certain to be infested by the terrible reptilia of South America, enormous electric eels likely enough amongst them, and would, consequently, have to make a considerable detour, giving us, Zulu reckoned, quite half-an-hour's grace.

"Of what ultimate value that half-hour's grace would be we knew not, but the hopeful, ferociously hopeful aspect of Zulu when we were fairly out of rifle range was reassuring. 'Ha ! ha !' he screamed with fiendish glee, and half turning round as he ran to shake his clenched fist defiantly in the direction of the soldiers, 'Ha ! ha ! we shall play you fine gentlemen, a clever, infernal trick yet ! Courage, Monsieur de Veron, courage ! Madame, Mademoiselle, and my gold are not lost yet !'

"The cause of the Carib's exultation was speedily apparent. Like the priest Zenos dwelling on the shores of the Amazon of whom you have frequently spoken, Father Rocca had erected, though we had not before observed it, a *sanctum* on the summit of contiguous trees, as a refuge against mosquitoes——"

"No," interrupted M. de Veron, "not Father Rocca. It was the work of his predecessor, the priest Balmar, who, in so doing, furnished a striking illustration of the man, who, in avoiding a shower of rain, tumbled into a river. The story as told by Father Rocca to my wife and Louise is mournful, tragic, but may interest you quite as much at all events, as this long history of our foolish selves. It is brief, and, for that reason, if no other, cannot weary you, as escaping from Cayenne, told by this brother-in-law of mine, must have done. It has not wearied you. Tut. See how my poor, simple Jules mistakes your polite complaisance for a compliment ! It is droll that !"

"Droll yourself!" exclaimed Penard, "but never mind, since you are in humour, go on with the story, only don't keep us too long out of Father Rocca's *sanctum*."

"You have not got there yet, my good Jules, but I won't keep you from it more than a few minutes.

"Amongst the medley of the Jesuit Balmar's converts," continued M. de Veron, "was a Mestiza, calling himself Juan Cristoval. He——"

"Best to take us with you," interrupted I. "What is a Mestiza?"

"A Mestiz or Mestiza," said Monsieur, "is the offspring of a Portuguese or any other European and an Indian woman. That is correct, I believe, M. Gotlieb."

"Certainly it is correct. And you, messieurs," added our host, "will probably have the undesirable opportunity of making personal acquaintance with the mongrel race before long, Asuncion, the principal city of Paraguay, being quite half peopled by Mestizas. They are, for the most part, nominally Christians, but their religion, I fear, is on the surface only. To parody a saying of the first Napoleon, 'Scratch a Carib or other Indian Christian, and you will find a savage beneath the skin.' Your Felice, perhaps, may be an exception."

"I think so," said M. de Veron, "but assuredly that wretched Cristoval was not. He was fleeing, he said, from a cruel tyrant-master, when, by the special favour of the Almighty——"

"The true Mestiza tone," interrupted Gotlieb; "the hybrid rascals are excruciatingly pious in palaver. I beg pardon for interrupting, but I detest the whole race, and with reason."

"Cristoval," resumed M. de Veron, "was, as he said, fleeing for his life from a cruel tyrant, when, by God's especial

grace, his footsteps were directed to Father Balmar's mission-station. He was hospitably received, his hurts, a broken arm amongst them, sedulously attended to; and having recovered his health, he elected to remain at the station with the good father, for a time at least, as an agricultural labourer.

"He was, it appears, a handy fellow," continued M. de Veron, "and would have been more useful had he been less lazy; but laziness is a climatic, ethnological disease. He had a talent, moreover, for music, and was as real or pretended an adept at snake-charming as an Indian of Bengal. Father Balmar liked and caressed Cristoval above all his other converts or dependents, and verily he had his reward!"

"Cristoval had been some six or seven weeks at the Mission, when a mounted party of Polizia arrived and halted there. Their chief, Señor Cazo—I think that was the name—a pleasant, garrulous sort of person, gossiped frankly about professional matters, spiced his talk freely, of course, with the surprising and sensational, and during his stay, which, on account of his own horse having fallen lame, was delayed for several days, related a story, which, at first listened to with languid interest, soon painfully awakened the priest's interest and attention.

"'You have not heard, reverend Father,' said Cazo, 'of Scñor Mendola's murder, committed about eight or nine weeks ago. Ah, to be sure, you live out of the world, seldom see a newspaper, whereas in Rio there is one published every week.' It was a most extraordinary affair, Señor Cazo went on to say, and he, for his share therein, had been much complimented. The substance of 'the extraordinary affair,' as related by the Brazilian Chef de Police, and repeated to me by Louise, was this.

‘Señor Mendola was a rich merchant of Rio. He was not the builder of his own fortune ; that had been done by his father, who had happily for him, as we say in France, been born before his less worldly son. Señor Mendola, indeed, contemplated retiring from business, and his young wife urged him to do so. He was a man of contemplative, studious habits, and, like our friend, Dr. Kirwan, an enthusiastic botanist. A favourite servant, Felipe Gaspar, a Mestiza, usually accompanied him in his floral researches, sometimes in dense forests miles away from his country residence.

“Upon one of those excursions he took his only child, a daughter aged about seven years, with him. They journeyed in a volante, a light carriage, drawn by one horse, and driven by Gaspar.

“The weather was delicious, the part of the forest where they had arrived was known to be perfectly free from savage beasts or venomous reptiles, and Señor Mendola, leaving Gaspar to mind the carriage and horse, took his daughter with him.

“The child was soon tired, and the Señor placed her high up amongst the branches of a banana-tree, fastening her carefully by a shawl secured round her waist, lest she should fall off when asleep. He did not propose to be long absent ; but though, as before stated, there were no, what are usually called, savage or venomous animals to be feared, she would be safer there than on the ground, as pecarries, wild hogs, were somewhat numerous thereabout. A grown armed man need not fear these creatures, except when they charge in a body, as they sometimes do, if greatly alarmed, but a child seven years old might not be safe from them.”

“I have seen,” remarked Gotlieb, as M. de Veron

freshened his lips, "I have seen a herd of pecaries charge, as you term it, when alarmed, and that charge is really a formidable one. Terror renders them reckless; and, gracious heaven! what an insufferable odour exhales through their sweating skins when in that state! It taints the air for a long time afterwards."

"So I have heard," said M. de Veron. "But to continue. Señor Mendola told the little Isabella he should not be gone many minutes, and we may be sure he meant to keep his word. But his favourite pursuit led him on and on, till the declining day, fading early in the always sombre forest, warned him it was high time to return to his child.

"He sought to do so, but found the task a difficult one, for he had completely lost himself in the tangled wilderness, and after hurrying on panting and breathless, first in one direction, then in another, sat almost despairingly down to recover his wind, and holla for assistance.

"Whether it was his frantic shoutings, or some other distracting uproar which terrified them, the pecaries did not say, but Señor Mendola's shouts were presently echoed by multitudinous gruntings, and the bewildered botanist beheld, at no great distance, a furious herd of pecaries, charging down upon him, determinedly convinced, it seemed, in their porcine minds that he must be the cause, and should be the victim of their sudden terror.

"Thunderstricken as the Señor was by this new terror, he still retained sufficient presence of mind to know that a tree was his only resource, and with hurried trembling steps he forthwith sought the shelter of one. The wild hogs rushed on, passed swiftly, urged by impelling terror, and soon disappeared, leaving behind them the abominable odour of which our excellent host has spoken.

"Meanwhile," continued M. de Veron, who, I suppose from frequent previous practice, told the story 'out of book,' as it were, and now speaking in graver mood, "meanwhile the Mestiza left in charge of the volante, surprised at his master's lengthened absence, had, first securing the horse, entered the forest in search of the Señor, and after wandering fruitlessly about for some time, at last heard Mendola's frantic shouts for help. Sound whether at sea or in a forest, is a very uncertain guide, and it was some time after the fortunately bloodless charge of the pecarries had swept past, that Gaspar discovered his master, still tree'd by fear lest the frantic hogs should return in search of him, much as you, Monsieur Sabine, described the Doctor to be by the observant jaguars self-stationed *en vedette* around him.

"The appearance of his armed Mestiza reassured Señor Mendola ; he hastened down from his perch, and both set out in search of the little Isabella.

"Long they searched in vain ; but at last, and just before it was quite dusk, the father's anxious fears were merged in a certainty of horror. His child he, in his distraction, at once concluded had been killed, devoured by pecarries, and probably the identical herd from which he had so narrowly escaped !

"Near the banana tree in the branches of which he had left the child, was found the scarf or shawl by which he had, he imagined, secured her safety, torn, and spotted with blood, together with other fragments, also deeply blood-stained, of her dress. The stifling odour of which we have spoken still strongly tainted the air, and the ground about the spot softened by late rain, appeared to have been trampled by numerous animals into mud. It was possible that they had battled together over their

prey. Pecarries, indeed, often when pressed by hunger, fight with and devour each other. The child had no doubt awoke, and frightened at finding herself alone had contrived to unfasten herself and slip down from the tree, in the hope of finding her father. Unfortunate father ! No sooner did the terrible truth flash upon his brain, than sense and strength forsook him, and he sank down in what seemed a death-swoon on the ground.

"It must have been," said M. de Veron after a pause, and speaking with emotion, "it must have been the sudden coincidence of two circumstances—discovery of the child's dreadful fate, and consequent helpless condition of its father that prompted the infernal impulse to which, though it should seem with some hesitation, the Mestiza gave murderous way. He hastily ran off to the volante, which happened to be at no great distance, and quickly returned carrying a bag in his hand. He then—but first I must tell you, that the Mestiza being a practised snake-charmer, was seldom without one or more of those delightful pets, which he would make dance to the music of reed-pipes, to the amusement, not only of the little Isabella, but her father.

"It was only" went on M. de Veron, "when the chief officer of the Polizia mentioned this circumstance that the attention of his auditor, the priest Balmar, was aroused.

"How,' he exclaimed with a start, 'what do you say ? A Mestiza, and clever serpent-charmer with reed pipes ?'

"Yes,' said the officer, 'but why should that surprise you ? Serpent-charming, or the pretension to do so, is common enough amongst Mestizas.'

"That is true,' said the priest. 'Pray proceed. An absurd notion momently flashed upon me, a very absurd notion, Go on, Señor Cazo.'

"' May it be,' said the officer, 'that such a man as Gaspar has been seen by you, reverend Father? He was traced to within not more than two days' journey from this Mission-Station. There is a large reward offered for Gaspar's apprehension, and I am even now in quest of him among others's.'

"The priest returned an evasive answer, and the Chef de Polizia proceeded.

"' When Señor Mendola dim'y recovered partial consciousness, Gaspar was leaning over him with one of his serpents, the deadly brown snake, in his hand, and was smearing his, Mendola's naked neck with a piece of the child's blooded raiment.

"' Returning life was at once arrested; the Señor instantly comprehending, mentally shaken, though he was, the deadly purpose of the Mestiza. He well knew that however the venomous instincts of the snake might be deadened by contact with civilisation, the scent of fresh blood would arouse them to fullest activity, and the reptile would bite at the place with all its venomous energy. The unfortunate gentleman's senses again completely left him, and he remembered nothing more.'

"About three hours afterwards, according to the officer's calculation," continued M. de Veron, "the Mestiza drove up to the door of his master's country mansion, hurried in a state of great agitation into the presence of Madame Mendola, brusquely told her that her husband and child had gone together into the forest, leaving him in charge of the volante, that he had searched for them for hours but could come upon no trace of either. He had almost dared to hope that they might have returned to the house, till he asked one of the servants.

"The whole household, it need scarcely be said, was

immediately in a state of tumult and consternation. ‘It was fortunate,’ Cazo with natural self-gratulation, remarked, ‘that he, and to Madame Mendola’s knowledge, happened to be on duty in the neighbourhood.’ He was instantly sent for, and, after closely questioning the Mestiza, set off with him, two Polizia, and a bloodhound, a great pet of the missing Señor, to the part of the forest indicated by Gaspar.

“As they rode along, Cazo, who said a vague suspicion of the Mestiza had, from the first moment he saw him, crossed his, the officer’s, mind, again questioned the nervous, trembling caitiff.

“‘Why,’ said he, ‘did you suggest that Señor Mendola and the child must have been devoured by wild beasts? The forest we are approaching is not known to be infested by them.’

“‘No—not known to be,’ said the Mestiza; ‘but one or more may have strayed there. Then serpents, as you, Señor, must well know, are to be found in every American forest.’

“‘Venomous serpents *may*, it is true, be found in this forest; and,’ added the shrewd officer (mind I am repeating this part of the story as told by himself), drawing his bow at venture, ‘venomous serpents *may*, upon occasion, be *taken* there for a purpose; who shall say?’

“At hearing these words, the face of the Mestiza turned to a ghastly hue. The officer’s suspicions were confirmed. He, however, asked no more questions.

“Having reached the part of the forest pointed out by Gaspar, the bloodhound was at once loosed, but for a long time the sagacious animal gave no sign of having scented the trail of its master. The full moon had risen, and the forest gleamed with sombrous light almost as vividly as

in the daytime. Nothing, however, no trace, not the faintest of the missing ones could be seen, and the calling bugles, with which Cazo had taken care to provide himself and men, rang through the stilly night without awaking any human or brute response.

"At last the hound, which had for some minutes shown restlessness, gave tongue with the sharp snapping bark peculiar to the Brazilian breed when they have struck a decisive blood-trail; it then went off at a swift, confident pace, and was safe not to utter another, the slightest sound, till the quarry was reached."

"They are wonderful dogs," said Gotlieb. "The Mestiza, knowing that, must have looked ghastlier than ever, I should think, after the officer's serpent insinuation."

"Likely enough, but Cazo, with all his cleverness, did not notice it, or he would, one would think, have kept a sharp look out upon the fellow. He did not, nor did his men. When the dog had run into the quarry, that is to say, had led them to his master's body, the officer, on looking about, found that the Mestiza had fled, no one knew when or in what direction. It was attempted to pursue the self-convicted felon by setting the hound upon his track, but the faithful animal could not be torn away from its master's corpse. The murderer consequently escaped, and though eagerly tracked and more than once heard of, and indeed seen, had not been captured."

"Señor Cazo," I remarked, "seems to have drawn largely on his imagination, for how on earth could he have known of the dead man's peccary fright, what his thoughts and sensations were upon discovering the blood-stained clothes of the child, and, when partially regaining consciousness, he found the Mestiza busy about his bark throat."

"That is certainly altogether inexplicable," said Gotlieb.

"Not at all inexplicable," said M. de Veron. "Señor Mendola was not dead, as without doubt the Mestiza believed him to be, and stimulating drinks being promptly administered, he, though sinking fast, lived for several hours, till near noon the next day, quite long enough to brokenly relate the story of his murder, and to see and embrace his child—a mercy which shed a holy light, a calm religious gladness and thanksgiving over the gloomy bed of death."

"His child!" exclaimed I and Gotlieb, in a breath. "Then Isabella had not been torn to pieces and devoured by wild hogs. That is a relief, even to us, the hearers only of the sad story. To the expiring father it must indeed have been, even in that dark hour, a joy unspeakable."

"No doubt of it. The child awoke, and, terrified at finding itself alone, had with difficulty unfastened the scarf, and descended the tree, but in so doing had scratched and torn not her clothes only, but her flesh, which in several places bled profusely. She, however, had strength enough to totter on, and for a long distance, she herself said, in the hope of finding her father, sobbing as she struggled on, till, exhausted by terror and fatigue, she sank down upon the ground, and remembered nothing more till she awoke in a labouring forester's cottage. The man was going home with a cart-load of wind-strewn timber he had collected, when he saw and saved the child.

"Cazo," continued M. de Veron, "had told his story in greater detail, no doubt, than I have, without being interrupted again by the priest Balmar, who, still agitated by a dim suspicion, listened to every word with eager interest,

"The officer had ceased speaking for some minutes, when the priest broke his persistent silence.

"'What motive,' he asked, 'could the murderer have to induce him to commit the dreadful deed?'

"'The common tempters to crime—greed, avarice—prompted the deed. The Señor Mendola had the womanish mania of wearing costly jewellery. On the day of his murder he had put on a diamond ring, known to be of very great value. That ring was missing, and had, no doubt, been taken by the murderer.'

"'No doubt, as you say, and that circumstance considered,' said the good priest, in a tone of relief, 'we may be sure the assassin made the best of his way out of the country, probably to the United States, where he would be easily able to dispose of the ring.'

"'I do not think so. The pursuit after him has been too close and hot for the miscreant to venture embarking at any attainable outport. No; he is concealed still, I believe, in some little frequented part of the country. Besides, as I told you, reverend Father, he has been twice or thrice seen and tracked to within no such very great distance of this place. Once he was fired at, at too long a range, unfortunately, but the officer was certain that his shot took effect, and from the peculiar muscular action of Gaspar when hit, that the rifle bullet struck the murderer's left arm, probably broke it. That statement startles you again, reverend Father,' added the officer. 'I cannot but think you possess, are afraid you possess, some knowledge of Gaspar's whereabouts. If so; if any, the faintest clue to the assassin's haunts can be furnished by you, I need not point out to a man of your high character and sacred calling, what, under such circumstances, is your plain, imperative duty.'

"The priest, who evinced great and painful emotion, did not immediately answer. Pressed again by Cazo, he said in an agitated voice,

"I do not need to be reminded of my duty; and directly I have satisfied myself as to what that duty clearly is, you may be sure I shall fulfil it. And not *till* then. I shall now be glad to be left alone. You are not leaving to-day, and when I need your presence, I will send you a message to that effect. One word more," added his Reverence, taking note of the officer's hesitation, "I promise you that the brief delay I ask for, before replying to your enquiries, shall not prejudice any chance you may at this moment have, of securing the person of the alleged murderer."

Satisfied by that assurance, the Chef de Police left the apartment, and shortly afterwards the house, on horseback, to make enquiry respecting another matter some miles away. All of his men but one went with him.

Cazo had no sooner left the room, than Balmar rang a sonette and bade the lad who answered the summons send Margaretta to him. Margaretta was a Creole woman, to whom the Mestiza, a good-looking fellow enough, had been paying ardent attention, with a view to marriage.

"Margaretta," said the Priest, with, for him, unusual sternness, "I noticed when the officer of Polizia was conversing, you repeatedly entered the room, though not summoned, and each time remained as long as possible, under the pretence of dusting and placing various articles of furniture. You heard one Gaspar, a Mestiza, spoken of? Have you any suspicion that you have ever seen that person?"

The woman coloured, and tremblingly owned that it struck her that he, the reverend Father, imagined Crist-

oval to be the Mestiza whom the officer was in quest of. She felt positive there was no foundation for such a dreadful surmise, but that his Reverence should, for a moment, have such a suspicion had painfully grieved her.

“‘Not more painfully, Margareta,’ said the Priest, ‘than it grieves, distresses me to be compelled to entertain it. Cristoval is now absent, has been so for nearly two days on a distant errand. I expect him to be back about noon. I shall then be taking, or endeavouring to take, my *siesta* up aloft in my aëry,’ added Balmar. ‘Send Cristoval to me there the instant he comes. We shall then be secure from listeners, and I hope he will be able to prove, that, whatever else may be justly laid to his charge, the guilt of murder is not upon his soul.’

“The woman promised obedience, and left the room. Not long afterwards the reverend Padre ascended to his aëry, as he termed it.

“Cristoval returned to the Mission somewhat earlier than he was expected, and was immediately closeted with the woman Margareta. This was noticed by the man whom Cazo had left at the station, with orders to keep his eyes and ears wide open, so as to be able accurately to report every incident that occurred during his chief’s absence. The man did not know the Mestiza, Gaspar, personally.

“The interview of Cristoval and Margareta, was, as I have stated, a long one. At its conclusion Margareta went into the kitchen, and, as the man supposed, resumed her household duties.

“Cristoval, who must have believed there was no person but Margareta and the Priest on the premises, or immediately near the place, all the resident hands being away busy at field work, slowly, reluctantly, stopping several

times, as if in doubt whether to proceed or not, at last, as if his mind was fully made up, sprang briskly up the ladders, and disappeared within the Priest's sanctum.

"The man stealthily approached immediately beneath the Priest's refuge, and listened attentively. At first he could only hear a confused murmur of voices ; before long that confused murmur swelled into an angry but still indistinct altercation. Next followed sounds as of a mortal struggle, and before the unready officer of Polizia could decide how to act, piercing screams rent the air, and almost at the same moment the body of the Priest, flung out of the doorway of his sanctum, shot sheer down, and the head striking upon a hard projecting root of one of the trees, the unfortunate Balmar was killed on the spot.

"The astounded officer was for some moments paralyzed by the suddenness of the shocking catastrophe, and before he could recover his self-possession, the Mestiza rapidly descended the hanging ladder, and, without pausing for a moment, made directly for the stables.

"The officer, quickly, but cautiously followed, and, unheard by the Mestiza, entered the stable at the same moment the assassin was placing a saddle on the back of the swiftest horse there.

"The officer, a very powerful man, at once sprang at the murderer, grappled, and overcame him almost without an effort.

"The Mestiza ceased after a few moments even to struggle, accepting, with the dogged despair characteristic of his race, the decree of destiny.

"'You need not bind me,' he said. 'I bow to adverse fate. It is true, as you no doubt suspect, as the Priest, unhappily for himself, did, that I am the Mestiza Gaspar, and poisoner of Señor Mendola. The diamond ring for

which I committed that crime, as you deem it, will be found amongst my things. I feared to offer the accursed thing for sale. And see,' added the Mestiza, a still darker despair settling upon his face, 'and see, I furnish you with another proof that I am the true Gaspar !'

¶ "Whilst speaking these last words the Mestiza drew a small tortoise-shell box from his pocket, opened it, seized a tiny pill it contained, and, with a motion too swift to be arrested by the officer, carried it to his lips, and swallowed it.

"The potent poison almost instantly accomplished its work. 'I—I—' gurgled from the murderer's throat, 'I told you I was the true Mestiza Gaspar ! Ha ! ha !' he feebly moaned, as he dropped to the ground dead, almost before he touched it, 'yes—yes—the true—Felipe Gaspar !'"

CHAPTER XIV

A CARIB CONSPIRACY.

"Now then that this charming episodical Mestiza story is happily concluded," said M. de Veron, "you, my poor Penard, can finish with our equally delightful doings at the same missionary station. We were just got back, you will remember, after cutting away the bamboo bridge. First, however, in compliance with our host's invitation, we will replenish with champagne and cigars. Good ! Now, Jules, *va en tête.*"

"Well, then, to finish with this long Cayenne chapter, of which," added Penard, "only about the last paragraph remains to be recited.

"We found Father Rocca and the ladies in a state of extreme nervous agitation. This was only too natural, and we should, no doubt, have subsided into a like condition had that irascible, hurrying Zulu allowed us time, which, fortunately, he was not inclined to do.

"This certainly showed the Carib's cool good sense ; it being obviously no time for talk or tears. Zulu, moreover, appeared to have so confidently settled in his own mind the exact mode in which we were to play our pursuers the infernal trick he promised them, that we instinctively obeyed his directions.

"These were simple enough. We, the fugitives from Cayenne, were to immediately hurry up, taking, of course, rifles and ammunition with us, to the Priest's *sanctum*.

“‘I shall join messieurs in a few minutes,’ added the Carib, with a ferocious grin, ‘directly I have given some very particular instructions to Pedro, who must remain here with his Reverence and the ladies. We will then draw up the ladders, and our friends the man-hunters will think twice before attempting to clamber up after us.’

“‘That may be,’ said the Priest, ‘but there are, you know, Zulu, very easy means of compelling you to surrender at discretion.’

“‘I know what you mean,’ said the Carib, with unabated confidence of tone and manner. ‘They might, for example, have resort to fire, try to burn us out, but our rifles will prevent them from approaching near enough for that. They could certainly soon starve us out; but I count upon your Reverence to save us from the necessity of surrendering, except upon terms—that our lives shall be spared, I mean.

“‘Monsieur Le Bossu,’ added the Carib, ‘is the chief in command of the soldiers, and he, I feel sure, though these messieurs may not think so, will give your Reverence his word of honour that his patron, the Governor of Cayenne, will respect that condition.’

“A chorus of rageful derision burst from us at these words. Le Bossu’s word of honour! Had the Carib suddenly taken leave of his senses?

“Zulu turned towards us with his back to the Priest, raised a finger to the tip of his nose, and with a silent grim, as ferociously expressive, as if he had laughed aloud, at once puzzled, and in a degree reassured us. The promised infernal trick was possibly in some way associated with the suggested treaty of surrender. Yet how?

“‘You, messieurs, may not, perhaps, know as well

as I do,' said Zulu, 'how really pious a person Le Bossu is, how deeply he reverences a Priest. Father Rocca has only to treat him kindly, hospitably, and, sure as we now live, he will agree to the Reverend Father's conditions. Ha, ha ! you shall see !' added the Carib, still gleefully exultant. 'Zulu wiser than white men. You shall see. But no more talk—your talk no use—only Priest's talk good now. Please, messieurs, to go up at once. I first speak with Pedro, then come to you. This way, Pedro,' added Zulu, leaving the room, followed by the lad, 'this way !'

"Puzzled, mystified, as we were, we could not but decide to follow the Carib's directions. De Veron and I tore ourselves away from our sobbing, terrified relatives, and speedily gained the Priest's aëry.

"The instructions to Pedro must have been briefly given and readily understood, as Zulu joined us after the lapse of a few minutes only. The pendant ladders were then drawn up, and we were tolerably safe from being stormed by escalade."

"I should think we were," said M. de Veron. "Half-a-dozen resolute men in such a place could have defied a hundred to attempt such a thing, loopholed as the place was—the possibility of having to defend it against predatory white or coloured bandits having been evidently contemplated, and with reason. Go on, Penard. Perhaps the lively little episode that follows may relieve the drowsiness which these late hours, and your lullaby tones, irresistibly induce."

"Indeed ! But I do not relate the story for your edification or amusement ; and as, moreover, the recalling to mind of what you term a lively little episode will be sure to give me a fit of nightmare, I will, with

our friends' leave, defer its narration till to-morrow morning. Good-night, messieurs."

"The action of the exciting drama," resumed Penard the next day, "at this stage proceeded rapidly. The pursuers rode up, drew bridle in our front, reconnoitred the position, and without the preliminary of a summons to surrender, opened fire with their rifles.

"This was mere folly. So well were we sheltered that not one of us was touched, and three of them went down before as many minutes had elapsed, Le Bossu, who kept his misshapen carcass well covered, unfortunately not amongst them. Had they continued within range but a very short time longer all danger of pursuit from them would have passed away."

"Holy blue, I should think so!" interposed M. de Veron, "what chance had they? Their blood was on fire, but the intuitive intelligence which distinguishes the soldiers of our nation, rebuked their ardour, and they wheeled off, not halting till they had placed the mission-house between themselves and our bullets. You smile, Monsieur Sabine," added the Frenchman, with heat. "You think, perhaps, with some of your countrymen whom I have met that *le feu Français* is mere straw and fire, as speedily burnt out as hastily kindled?"

"I had no such stuff in my thoughts, Monsieur. It appears to me that the soldiers acted with a wise discretion, and that, we all know, is the best part of valour."

"Finish with it, Penard," said M. de Veron. "I shall not again interrupt."

"Complete silence," said Penard, "succeeded to the rattle of musketry. The soldiers stabled their horses and entered the Priest's dwelling by the back way.

After a while three or four unarmed men stole timidly out and came within range, one of them waving aloft a white handkerchief, as a flag of truce. They came to withdraw the bodies of their comrades, who, though brought down by our fire, had not been killed outright. That pious duty would not have been interrupted by us, even had not Father Rocca accompanied the party and held up his arms, beseeching us with earnest gesticulation not to fire.

"Their errand accomplished, the soldiers did not again reappear, and there could be no doubt of their intention to starve us into surrender. Of course a sharp look out was being kept upon us, though we could not see the watchers. The mode of deliverance contemplated by Zulu, the nature of the infernal trick to be played upon our pursuers, was still a mystery. Could the Carib be serious, or had he suddenly lost his senses ?

"A considerable time elapsed. Zulu still retained the stolid ferocity of expression he had manifested since the soldiers had so nearly clutched us; and remained obstinately dumb to our anxious questioning. I fancied, however, that some disquieting apprehension—manifesting itself by an increasing ghastly pallor spreading his features, and the fierce glancing of his restless eyes—was beginning to shake his confidence.

"At last there was a stir and bustle distinctly audible from within the mission-house, gradually becoming louder, more boisterous. It was a sound of revelry, which went on *crescendo* till it reached a riotous pitch, and then as gradually died away, and all was still as death."

"What had become of the servants, labourers, all that time?" asked M. Gotlieb.

"They had hidden themselves at the suggestion of

Zulu. I forget under what pretence he urged concealment."

"Pretence!" exclaimed M. de Veron. "It was a threatening probability, that some of them, at all events, would have been seized and carried off to Cayenne, if only for an example and *pour encourager les autres*, not to harbour or in any way abet the escape of French prisoners, who might come across their path. Circumstances alter cases, and had not matters turned out as they did, I doubt if even the clerical *status* of the Priest would have saved him from a visit to La Gabrielle!"

"That is quite possible. The children of Voltaire have, as a rule, but slight respect for sacerdotal sacredness. The stillness as of death I was speaking of," continued Penard, "was suddenly broken by a pistol shot, loud screaming, and a frantic cry of women. The trump of doom could not have more startled M. de Veron and myself. A new horror, the bare imagination of which had not crossed our minds, flashed, lightning-like, upon us.

"Before the impulse given by that electric shock could be expressed in action, the door of the mission-house was flung open, and the Carib lad, Pedro, rushed out, followed by Le Bossu, with a revolver-pistol in his hand, the barrel still smoking with a recent discharge. He pursued and was again aiming at the boy, with a staggering, half-drunken aim, when Zulu, with vengeful promptness, raised his rifle, fired, and the hunchback, with a yell of despair and hate, fell forward on his face—stone dead!

"The lad Pedro, quickly recovering his impassive Carib coolness, beckoned us to come down. The imp-face gleamed with demoniac triumph as he spoke to Zulu, in their native gibberish. 'All right, messieurs,' exclaimed

Zulu,' turning to us, 'the soldiers won't take us back to Cayenne this time.'

"The ladders were instantly lowered, and in an indescribable state of mind we hurried down, and entering the house were overwhelmed with a sight, the surpassing horror of which will never pass from my mind. The boy Pedro had drugged the wine with which the Priest regaled his unwelcome guests, and poisoned them all."

"It was a horrible sight, no doubt," said M. de Veron, "but the reality was not so bad ; the Carib's conspiracy was not such a devilish piece of work as we, at the first moment of shuddering horror, believed it to have been."

"The affrighting spectacle," continued Penard, which thus—— But I had better, perhaps, relate what had occurred as if I had, unseen, witnessed the progress, the actual carrying out of Zulu's infernal trick. This, then, was the manner of it :—

"The soldiers, though sulky and savage at first, soon allowed themselves to be mollified by the Priest's gentle words, and the excellent fare which he placed before them. Even Le Bossu seemed to subside into apparent *bonhomie*. *Anguila in herba*. The snake sought to conceal itself in the grass, not successfully as regarded Madame de Veron and Louise. He had at first *brusquely* asked their names. The sudden question took Father Rocca by surprise ; his pale face glowed with alarm and embarrassment, readily feeling as he did that to give their real names would be to fatally compromise them. At last he stammered out, 'Madame et Mademoiselle Guibal.' The snake eye glittered mockingly. Le Bossu must at once have guessed the truth ; but instantly couching its hideous crest, the serpent hissed out, 'Madame et Mademoiselle *Guibal !*' Guibal with an emphasis of satanic sarcasm. 'Indeed !

I make the ladies my respectful compliments. I once knew a most estimable family of that name in my native Picardy.'

"The soldiers drank freely, as soldiers naturally would. Padre Rocca very moderately as he always did. Le Bossu evidently restrained himself, a vague suspicion apparently lurking in his mind that some device might be afoot for enabling the fugitives from Cayenne to escape, requiring for its defeat that he at least should keep himself tolerably sober.

"The ladies, who sat apart gloomily forebodeful of the issue, did not taste the wine, Pedro having managed to warn them in a whisper not to do so.

"They supposed the cunning young Carib, instructed by Zulu, had mixed some preparation of opium with the wine, and that the soldiers were unconsciously taking sleeping draughts, which might possibly enable their friends and themselves to make a fresh effort to escape.

"Nothing more than that, and you may be sure they watched the progress of the plot with fear and trembling. The soldiers speedily became hilariously excited, sang, shouted, vented coarse curses upon the 'tree'd' *scélérats* who had given them so much trouble and dared to resist capture, for which crimes they would, without doubt, be deservedly shot.

"The wine worked! Song and shout died away, and a general languid listlessness, gradually deepening into sleep, overgrew the boisterous revellers. Soon the heads of some drooped upon the table, and their eyes closed; but these, it was noticed, were those—Le Bossu and the Priest amongst them—who drank most sparingly. The limbs of the others stiffened into rigidity, their eyes remained open, their light gradually fading, till they sat like statues staring blindly upon vacancy. A most ap-

palling spectacle to Madame de Veron and her daughter must have been that drama of death, evolving itself in pantomimic silence before their eyes."

"The wine," remarked one of the Messrs. Gotlieb, "must have been drugged with a compound known as *Maita*. It is a powerful medicine, of great efficacy in certain kinds of fever as well as a deadly poison. It is easily prepared, and few families care to be without it. It is quite tasteless, too, and a very minute quantity is a potent dose."

"You are right, M. Gotlieb, it was 'maita' we were told that had been used by the Caribs. The effect," added Penard, "appeared to be complete, and ferociously exultant, Pedro exclaimed in a loud voice, 'Ha! ha! Monsieur le Secretaire, it is Pedro who catch you not you Pedro,' at the same moment savagely slapping Le Bossu on the back. The hunchback, who had only imbibed a sufficient quantity of maita to send him soundly to sleep, started up, glared fiercely round, appeared to at once comprehend the situation, uttered a horrible curse, snatched a revolver from his belt, and fired at Pedro, who, astounded by the sudden awakening of his enemy, had remained for a few moments paralyzed. He missed his aim; the ladies screamed; and Pedro darted out, followed by Le Bossu as before described !

"Seven of the soldiers," continued Penard, "those who slept with their eyes open, were, we found, poisoned past help; the others we, with more or less difficulty, recovered. Father Rocca was very seriously affected. There was another death; that of the sentinel placed to watch our movements, and give the alarm should we attempt to descend from the Priest's aëry. Pedro had supplied him abundantly. He was dead, rigid as stone.

"There is little to add," said Penard. "Shocked, horrified as we were by the strange horror of the catastrophe, it was necessary to be gone without delay ; as, though the half-poisoned soldiers would not be able to renew pursuit for many days, we could not be sure that there were not others upon our track. Father Rocca being one of the poisoned, that circumstance would, we rightly judged, prevent suspicion falling upon him : that he had not been warned, as Madame de Veron and Louise were, by the Carib imp, was, therefore, in a certain sense fortunate."

"What," I asked, "became of the two Caribs ?"

"They went off, whither, we did not inquire, or care. We had been saved by their infernal trick, but there was a devilism in the catastrophe which stamped them, in our eyes, as murderers. Yet, what will you ?" added Penard ; "they were playing for their lives ! The most civilised men, under such circumstances, would scarcely hesitate at the means of saving their own at the cost of those who were seeking to deliver them into the hands of the executioner !"

"I remember reading a confused account of the affair," said M. Gotlieb, "in a Buenos Ayres paper. At least I suppose the paragraph must have referred to the same incident. Did Zulu receive the reward ?"

"Yes," said M. de Veron. "There was some scruple about it ; murder money, some of us called it ; but it was decided to keep faith with the unscrupulous savage. And after all, I am not sure that if Zulu had previously informed us of the nature of his infernal trick, we should have peremptorily forbidden him to save us by such a diabolical device. Not, thunder of heaven ! at all sure that we should ! Indeed, my private and very decided

opinion is that we should have tacitly allowed him to have his own way, and, in our hearts, have wished him success. The story of our escape from Cayenne, so far as it is accomplished, is now told. The last striking incident previous to our meeting with you and your friends, Monsieur Sabine," added M. de Veron, "was the tragedy enacted on the banks of La Plata River."

CHAPTER XV.

IN PARAGUAY.

OUR envoy, Dr. Kirwan, arrived the next day but one, accompanied by the two negroes, and bringing with him a large sum in gold. Louise de Veron had, as I knew would be the case, been warmly received by Madame Elsworthy. The Doctor was the bearer of a letter from that lady expressing in passionate terms the bitter grief she felt for the probable fate of Ellen Marston—that of poor Roland, though her relative by marriage, was in comparison but coldly remarked upon—and adjuring me to spare no effort on her behalf. If money could effect her liberation, a queen's ransom should be paid, though about what amount that figure of speech signified, the excited lady did not specify.

Mr. Elsworthy, she apprised me, had obtained an interview with the Orleans Prince, Count d'Eu, the son-in-law of the Emperor of Brazil, and obtained from him an order written in cypher, commanding any and every officer of the Brazilian army to assist me to the utmost of his power, should, by any chance, such assistance be of service.

The Doctor was the bearer of this order, which, however, was not at all likely to avail us, the proposed scene of action being the capital of a State at deadly, uncompromising war with Brazil.

Kirwan at once transferred it to me, saying, as he

placed it in my hands, "Were I you, Mr. Sabine, I would not carry such a drum-head court martial document about with me. It cannot be of any possible use to you in any part of Paraguay, and, if by any chance found on your person, you would be a target for the President's ruffian soldiers in just no time were you ten times an Englishmen."

"That is true," said I; "and it may be as well to tear it up at once."

"Let me have it," said M. de Veron. "I shall not be afraid of its being found on me, were I searched expressly for it. It is quite possible that in the shifts and changes to which knights errant are exposed, it may prove of inestimable value. Now, as to disguises ! M. Elsworthy, being himself a Great Briton, agrees with the Bandit Captain that we should all assume to be Great Britons. That is quite natural ; *civis Anglicanus sum* ; a potent spell to conjure with, no doubt, if the English Admiral on the South American station would send one or two ships of war to drop anchor off the Paraguayan capital ; otherwise, mere words—a pompous brag !"

"That may be, M. de Veron ; but it being quite certain that no other assumed nationality would be a *more* efficient protection, and as M. Elsworthy has sent us not only the requisite clothing to make up as solid substantial John Bull traders, and descriptive official papers, written, I suspect, with gold pens, which give us familiar English names, we cannot do better than follow his and the Bandit Captain's advice."

It was so settled ; and with some few alterations made by the family tailor, a negro, rather clever in that line, we made up very well indeed as James Smith, Richard Sims, and John Brown. The Doctor retained his proper

name, and was possessed of genuine papers. His having been initiated in the business of cattle buying by Romero, might stand us in good stead, he having visited, with that rascal and his friend Cazias, more than one Hacienda in the States of Paraguay and the Argentine Republic. He might, should occasion require it, refer to some of the cattle breeders with whom he had negotiated, though no sales had been effected, in proof of our being genuine buyers of South American stock. There was one difficulty suggested by our French friends which would require some management and tact. Their English was simply abominable, though they had both been taught it at college. It was not, however, likely the general Paraguayan ear would detect defects of accent and pronunciation; and if personal interviews with Madame Lynch, or the President himself, who, I knew, had finished his education in England, were required, I alone would represent the firm of Smith and Company.

The day previous to our departure upon the maddest enterprise, according to him, ever undertaken by human beings supposedly in their right senses, the younger Gotlieb sought a last serious conference with me. Hans Gotlieb was freer of speech than his brother Carl, and he and I had entertained a real friendship for each other from the first day I saw him.

Most vehemently did he iterate over and over again the arguments, the entreaties, he had previously urged, in the forlorn hope, as he feared it to be, of prevailing upon me at the last moment to forego my rash, suicidal purpose.

Finding me immovable, he at last said, with unwonted solemnity of tone and manner—"There is another and paramount consideration, Mr. Sabine, which *should* forbid

you to cast life recklessly away. If I have not been misinformed by your friend Roland, it is not your own to throw away!"

"What do you mean? My life is not my life!"

"No. It is, I have been told, pledged to a young and charming lady, who, if you perish—as if you persist in this wild enterprise you almost certainly will, and by your own act, as truly as if you should take poison or blow your brains out—will be flung, unfortuned, homeless—a stray, forlorn waif, blown hither and thither on the bleak wastes of a hard, unsympathising world. Can you have the heart—nay, the courage to do this?"

Hans Gotlieb's fervent words pierced me as with a dagger! How was it that the consequences to Emily Sinelair, should I lose my life in the vain endeavour to save that of Harry Roland, had not previously presented themselves to my mind?—at least not presented themselves with anything like such terrible force as now, when urged by my new friend, who himself knew not Emily.

I turned sick at heart, groaned aloud, hid my shamed face in my outspread hands. It was quite true! Faithful to my friend, I was faithless to the lady of my love!

It was, however, I felt, too late! I could not be branded as a miserable braggart, who had vaunted of the bold deeds which self-sacrificing friendship would prompt him to attempt, and when the time for action arrived shirked his proclaimed purpose. Never!

"I feel deeply what you have urged, Hans Gotlieb," I at last said; "acutely feel it. But I must persist! To now skulk out of the enterprise—utterly mad, certain to be fatal as you may deem it to be—is simply impossible. My sacred word is pledged——"

"Your sacred word," interrupted Gotlieb—"and I have no doubt your solemn oath—were before pledged to the beautiful orphan spoken so highly, admiringly of by Mr. Roland."

"It is true ! it is true ! Still I cannot draw back. Miss Sinclair herself would despise me should I do so. It would prove me to be utterly unworthy of her. In the words of the poet, I might, addressing her, sincerely say—

'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.'

No, no ; the die is cast and I *must* stand the hazard of the throw."

Finding it was useless to argue further with me, Hans said, "Well, since you are determined to challenge Fate, we must do what little we can to help you to a fortunate issue. There is a letter of introduction to Señor Huerta, an eminent advocate at Ascuncion, with whom we have had important transactions. He is a person of large influence, one of the astutest men in Paraguay, and freely open to a heavy bribe—the heavier the better. He may serve you, and also may *sell* you, should that appear to him the more profitable game. Use Señor Huerta if you can, but at the same time beware of him. People say he is on intimate terms with Lopez himself ; but of that we cannot, of our own knowledge, speak. We do, however, know he is hand-and-glove with Madame Lynch—her trusted confidant and counsellor ! "

I thanked my friend, and would, he might rely, act with all possible prudence.

"I trust you will," said Hans Gotlieb ; "and now to speak with you upon another, but strictly collateral, topic. You are, I believe, by your elder brother's death, the

heir at law to large landed and personal property. That being so, you must at once make your will."

"My will! I have no doubt, whatever the law may be, that at my father's death the whole of his property, real and personal, will be mine. But as to making a will! Why I am not of age!"

"No matter for that. The will will express your last, shall I say, your dying wishes. Your father, from what I have heard of his character, will sacredly respect it, should he be living when it reaches England, and he hears that the hand which traced it is cold in death, that his son is sleeping in a foreign grave. Make your will at once: I will assure its proper execution, and should my fears be verified, forward it safely to Mr. Elsworthy for transmission to England."

I sat up all night, writing my will, and letters to Emily and the Squire. How the old time came over me as I wrote! Standing between the Past with its roseate hopes, its flowers, its sunshine, and the cold, gloomy Future, a sense of utter desolation stole over me, and—tell it not in Gath—I wept—wept even as a little child. Need I say that I willed all—all to Emily.

"You are looking very ill," said Hans Gotlieb, as I handed him the will and letters, "very ill."

"Can you," said I, "be surprised at that? I have been sitting all night in the antechamber of Death and thinking of Home."

"It is yet time," he answered, "to forego this mad enterprise. You will lose yourself without saving your friends."

"I cannot, my good Hans, now draw back. Nay, I would not, *will* not. I was not born for shame. I shall share Harry Roland's fate."

The capital of Paraguay is built in the form of an amphitheatre. On its western side flows the river of that name dividing it from the desert of Gran Chaco. The city consists mainly of one street with numerous alleys leading out of it. The red-tiled houses are built apart, and generally surrounded by orange groves. They consist of one storey only, not excepting Government House, and many have small shops in front. Convents are plentiful, and there is one very large jail, always fully occupied.

Ascungon wears a repulsive, hardly semi-civilised aspect to the eye of an Englishman. The population, consisting mainly of Creoles, Mestizas, Indians, and Negroes, seem to be in keeping with their habitat. They, almost without exception, are marked by a cowed, slavish expression of countenance; and yet there is a sort of surface, imbecile gaiety in their demeanour and florid, jabbering speech, which, supplemented by innumerable cockatoos, humming-birds, parrots, keeps up a buzzing din, that simulates, in some sort, the healthy hubbub of active, commercial life.

There appeared to be a good deal of slovenly drilling of troops going on, and a very sorry set of soldiers they seemed to be. Yet I was told they fought pretty well against the Imperial forces, the potent stimulant of courage probably being the certainty, enforced by numerous examples, that if they too readily ran away, they would be inexorably shot by order of the President.

The Government is a pure, that is, an 'Asiatic,' despotism, the issues of life and death being absolutely at the discretion of the Dictator, a prerogative which, in our time, was shared by her Excellency, Mrs. Lynch, a fineish-looking Irishwoman, who, it was generally believed, made a profitably humane use of her power, much preferring gold to blood-shedding, a gracious quality of mind which

I proposed to turn, if possible, to preeious account. With what success I shall presently show.

I may here correct Miss Marston's assertion that it was the father of Lopez the Second who had inspired such awe by his terrible severities, that every one, when alluding to him, with bated breath, spoke of him as *Il Defunto*. It was the first Dictator, Doctor Roderigo Francia, who bequeathed that legacy, or sign of terror, to his slave-subjects and their progeny.

We reached the Paraguayan Capital in safety, and, so far as appearances went, without having incurred suspieion, certainly without having suffered annoyance.

This, no doubt, was chiefly owing to our highly respectable, broad-clothy, commercial make-up, and in some degree, spite of M. de Veron's sneer at *civis Anglicanus sum*, to our papers showing us to be Englishmen. The shadow of the British flag extends far beyond the spot where it actually flies.

The apprehended difficulty which might arise from our French friends' peculiar English, was 'turned,' in military phrase, by an ingenious expedient, suggested by a passage in Beaumarchais' Marriage of Figaro. The quick-witted Barber, who had boasted of having lived in England, being questioned as to his knowledge of the English tongue, replies that it chiefly consisted of 'God-dems,' uttered in varying tones to suit the occasion. 'There are to be sure,' adds Figaro, 'many other small words scattered here and there, but one quickly perceives that 'God-dem' is the foundation of the langnage!'

Aeting upon that hint, M. de Veron and Penard, whenever spoken to in English, usually quite as atrocious as their own, though with a difference, would button themselves up, as it were, and surlily exclaim as they

turned away, ‘God-dem ;’ an expletive which, whilst verifying beyond doubt their nationality, might be, and usually was, understood to convey a sharp rebuke of the speaker’s objectionable ignorance of the tongue in which he presumed to address them. This little manœuvre, neatly performed, completely rid us of the lingual difficulty !

We lit upon no trace, whilst *en route*, of Belez and his captives, or of Harry Roland and Felice. This was mainly owing to the extreme reticence we were obliged to observe in making inquiry. At the hostelry, El Gobernadora, to which we had been commended as the best of the desperately bad Paraguayan houses of public sojourn, we might incidentally hear of our friends from the timid gossips of the coffee or billiard rooms ; but we should scrupulously avoid making anything like direct inquiries concerning persons that had incurred the President’s displeasure. Presuming to ask who had been lately shut up in the great jail, and the reasons for their incarceration, would be neither more nor less than ensuring yourself permanent lodgings therein before you were half-an-hour older.

Our only safe—if safe—resource would be Señor Huerta ; and shortly after we had temporarily settled down at El Gobernadora, I despatched a note to that eminent personage, requesting him to name as early a time as possible when I could see him, and present a letter of introduction from the Messrs. Gotlieb.

An answer was promptly returned. Señor Huerta would have much pleasure in receiving Mr. James Smith the next day, at about noon ; and Señor Huerta would felicitate himself if it were in his power to be of service to a friend of his respected clients, the Messrs. Gotlieb.

This was not an unpromising commencement, and we

sat down to dinner in more cheerful, appetising mood than had lately been the case. The dinner and wines, excellent of their kind, contributed restorative, consoling influence, and the sombre curtain of the Future became gradually clearer, brighter, tinted if but faintly, fugitively, with glancing, roseate rays. Solemnly suggestive truly, writes Professor Dryasdust, is the connection between the body and spirit—the action and reaction constantly going on of matter upon mind, mind upon matter. As for example, how gloomy fancies are notoriously fed, strengthened by meagre diet, and glowing aspirations of the soul kindled, sublimised by a first-rate dinner with *et ceteras!*

No question of it; and on this particular occasion *pato real*—royal duck—a bird peculiar to Paraguay, stuffed with chesnuts, and about the size of a fat, full-grown English goose, supplied, by its savoury and thirst-provoking qualities, its full quota of mental exaltation, which culminated so gloriously that when, as I somewhat confusedly remember, we separated for the night, all the difficulties and perils in the way of the captive's rescue, had been surmounted, or pushed aside; and Harry and Ellen, Edward and Louise, with their valiant liberators, were speeding in the British mail-packet across the dark-blue seas to merry England, on whose inviolate shores—clearly visible, in the fast diminishing perspective, to one at least of the passengers—stood Emily, beckoning with outstretched fairy fingers——Ah!

We undoubtedly *were* half-seas over, and well deserved the serious rebuke which the Doctor, steadying himself by double hand grasp of the table, delivered on his legs, which, though he was a hale man, did not, for the moment, seem to be quite equal to the situation. That

is, the elders deserved it. I, my friend the reader must remember, notwithstanding the years, in imagination, of peril and adventure passed through since "my love and I parted," was still a minor—a boy. Besides, to tell the honest truth, I—in the midst of the noisy, feverish mirth, like Parson Evans, when nervously awaiting the arrival of Doctor Caius—"had great dispositions to cry."

Will the reader excuse these halting digressions? The recalling to memory of such incidents, whilst jotting down these notes of travel, afford a pleasing respite—as might a resting-place, however brief the rest—to a wayfarer, emerging from one dark, perilous path to presently plunge, knowingly, into yet gloomier coverts.

Morning brought soberness and soda water; one consequence of which lowering of the temperature was, that Dr. Kirwan retracted his promise to accompany me to Señor Huerta's office.

He *had* thought on the previous evening that his riper judgment and greater experience in the ways of men, might have been of service to me, if openly employed; but night brings counsel, and he *now* thought it would be wiser to keep himself clear of direct action, in the very praiseworthy efforts about to be made for the liberation of our friends.

"It is a well known axiom," said the worthy Doctor, "amongst lawyers, that the man who pleads his own cause has a fool for his client. That is obviously true, for the plain reason that the judgment of a retained pleader or counsellor will not be disturbed, clouded by apprehension of the personal consequences affecting himself, which are in issue. By parity of reasoning," added the Doctor, "I, as a spectator of a game in which not liberty alone but life itself is staked, shall be of far

greater service to the players, my friends, than if I played myself."

"Your reasoning, Doctor," said I, "is irrefragable as a demonstration in Euclid. I will confer alone with Señor Huerta, and have no fear of being deceived or duped by him. Common sense is usually more than a match for wildest cunning. But what was this M. de Veron, *alias* Brown, was saying about a white heron—a *pair* of white herons?"

The Doctor 'lit up' in an instant. He was, I must premise, as enthusiastic a bird-fancier in an ornithological sense as he was a botanist. "A most remarkable circumstance," he said. "I, M. de Veron, and Penard were sitting in the bar yesterday afternoon, whilst you were in another room writing to Señor Huerta and Messrs. Gotlieb. They, our French friends, were silently sipping punch—nothing passing their lips *outwardly*, the bar being crowded, but an occasional 'God-dam,' as if the punch was not precisely to their liking. I, on the contrary, being an undisguised Englishman, with nothing to fear, being engaged in no plot, however praiseworthy, meritorious that plot might be—Why do you smile, Mr. Sa—Mr. Smith I mean; is that not true?"

"Yes, yes; quite true. You don't even know why *we* are here in disguise!—eh?"

"Well as to that," said the Doctor relapsing into uncomfortableness, "a question might arise as to whether complicity could be inferred from—"

"Never mind, Doctor, for the present whether it could or could not. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' But about those wonderful white herons?"

"About the wonderful white herons. Well, yes. A very remarkable circumstance indeed! I having, as you

know, no reason for keeping my lips sealed in promiscuous company, freely conversed not only in Portuguese, French but in English, with any one who affected acquaintance with the language. I talked on many topics, but not one in the faintest degree verging upon politics, foreign or domestic, imperial or presidential."

"I can readily believe that. Well?"

"Amongst other things I spoke with enthusiasm, being in unwonted flow of spirits and speech, of the rare birds of South America, the glorious plumage of many varieties. The feathered tribe of these regions are indeed gorgeously arrayed. The *pato real*, for example, which we so relished yesterday at dinner, is splendidly plumed. Buffon," continued the Doctor, getting well astride one of his favourite hobbies and going in for a gallop, "Buffon, the French naturalist, an unreliable authority at all times, pleasant and picturesque as his pages are, is ludicrously incorrect when writing upon the beasts and birds of the Americas. That, however, regard being had to the time in which he lived, is not so surprising. Wilson, sir, Wilson, Mr. Sabine, is the only American ornithologist of well-established reputation."

"I may not doubt my dear sir; but, excuse me, it is getting towards noon, and the white herons appear to be still far off."

"I was just coming to them. The heron is found only in South America, and—"

"Pardon me, Doctor," said I interrupting, "I have shot several herons in England."

"Yes, yes; there are herons and herons. I mean that the heron is only seen in his true magnificence in these countries, and the pure heron is rare even here. Now, Buffon asserts that the original white heron, purely white,

is to be found in the Brazils and contiguous countries. That has been denied, set down as a fiction invented by the imaginative French naturalist. Well, I mentioned the circumstance, and asked the company, all men apparently of Paraguayan respectability, whatever that may count for, if any of them had seen or heard of a purely white heron. Not one of them had. I concluded, therefore, that M. Buffon, himself but a book-naturalist, had been imposed upon, or that the white heron was an invention of his own. I did the illustrious Frenchman—illustrious, notwithstanding his shortcomings and mistakes—wrong, I find, in coming to that conclusion."

"Then you have discovered a white heron, and so ends the story." It was time.

"It does not so end," said the Doctor; "but I will not detain you more than another minute. Early this morning, one Orvieta—here is his address: Señor Juan Orvieta, Los Mercedes, a place about three miles west of this city informs me he has a pair, male and female, of white herons, which he is not unwilling to dispose of. I jumped at the chance," added the Doctor, rubbing his hands with imbecile exultation, as it seemed to me, we, himself inclusive, having such momentous issues, to be at any moment perhaps fatally resolved, on our hands. "And I agreed to be at Los Mercedes to-day with, I believe, M. de Veron and Penard; Orvieta, a very simple, honest fellow or I am no physiognomist, having suggested that, as we are strangers to each other, it were well that I should take friends with me, so as not to wholly rely upon my own judgment. Well, what is it?"

"The curricles you ordered is at the door," replied the head waiter, a specially melancholy Mestiza; and just then, though it might be fancy, I thought his gloomy

glance, as it rested on the Doctor, gleamed with a feebly compassionate expression.

"All right! I shall be ready in a minute or two. Good-bye Mr. Sab—Mr. Smith—what a habit I have of confusing names! Good-bye, I shall be back in time for dinner."

"Dr. Kirwan," said I, giving words to a vague suspicion which the Mestiza's dimly warning look had strengthened. "Dr. Kirwan, you appear to have what your countrymen would call 'a bee in your bonnet,' concerning those fabulous white herons, though they may be sufficiently real to bait a man-trap. Take my advice, don't accept that simple, honest fellow Orvieta's invitation."

The Doctor hesitated for a moment only. "Nonsense," he replied. You, Mr. Sabine, are of a peculiarly imaginative temperament. Realities, terrible as they may be, do not seem to frighten you; but of late I notice you start at shadows! Good-bye again, I shall be here in time for dinner, never fear."

In about ten minutes M. de Veron and Penard came in.

"You declined then to accompany the Doctor," I remarked.

"By thunder! I should think so! We have no belief in white herons, except as decoy birds. Yet why should *ce pauvre Docteur* be pitched upon? God knows! It may be all imagination," added M. de Veron, "though I do not remember to have ever been complimented on my gifts in that respect,—but it certainly does seem to me, that the people about look upon us, and more and more emphatically so with every passing hour, as unfortunates, self-doomed to inevitable destruction."

"That is my impression also," said Penard, in a tone

grave, solemn as a funeral bell, “though I could not give, perhaps, a tangible reason for the boding oppression that weighs upon me. But courage! And if not courage—resignation! What is writ, is writ! Who shall arrest the hand on the dial of time—control the finger of Fate?”

“Ah, for Heaven’s sake, Messieurs!” said I, “do not let us indulge in rhetorical pathos about fingers of Fate! We must have faith in our own courage, and rely, under Providence, for success and safety on the exercise of whatever common sense, judgment, coolness, we possess. If we do, I have but little doubt of a fortunate result. *Finis coronat opus!*”

“It is quite true as you say,” said M. de Veron, with a touch of his old acrid humour, “it is quite true as you say that it is the end which crowns the work, though whether the crowning will be a garland or a gallows must, till the supreme hour strikes, be more or less problematical. However, Louise is safe, far out of adverse Fortune’s reach; an immense consolation, and *parole d’honneur*, friend Sabine, consolation is needed just now. Does your purpose hold,” M. de Veron abruptly added. “Does your purpose hold to see and confer with this Señor Heurta?”

“Assuredly it does. Why do you ask such a question? How, except by Huerta’s help, can we reasonably hope to effect our friend’s deliverance?”

“True—true! A silly question, as you say. But I know not how it is. The very air pulsates with distrust. I seem to inhale it with every breath I draw. At what time do you expect to return?”

“How can I say? Señor Heurta may insist on my staying to dine with him.”

“To be sure he may. These South Americans, it cannot be denied, are a very hospitable people. Of such

caressing manners, too, and never more so than when they are preparing to strike you under the fifth rib. The velvet glove effectually conceals the tiger claw till the curtain is about to fall upon the last scene of the tragic farce. Bah!" broke off M. de Veron, with an awkward attempt to resume his ordinary calm indifference of tone and manner, "bah! why should I seek to infect others with my feverish fanciful megrims? We shall be anxious to hear how you have sped," he added. "We shall not retire at all events till you return."

CHAPTER XVI.

SEÑOR HUERTA AND HIS CLERK.

A PLEASANT affable gentleman I found Señor Huerta to be. Remarkably frank, outspoken. It struck me as excessively so, for a lawyer; but his brown, beady, vivacious eyes expressed so much guileless *bonhomie*, that I soon felt it was a friend, a sympathising friend, not a dry, hard bargain-driving man of business I was conversing with. He passed a high encomium upon the Messrs. Gotlieb, whose friends he was rejoiced to serve to the best of his ability even at some risk to himself. In short, I was perfectly at ease, at home with Señor Huerta, ere I had been a quarter of an hour with him. We were indeed under an obligation to Messrs. Gotlieb, never to be adequately repaid, for such an introduction. What was that fine thing somebody wrote about the deceitfulness of first impressions? I do not for the moment remember the words, but the truth of the sagacious, if not moral, reflection, is vividly impressed upon mind and memory.

Señor Huerta listened with mild, earnest patience, with touching interest indeed to my somewhat prolix statement. He had especially urged me to conceal nothing from him in order that he might not be working in the dark.

I complied, relating the minutest circumstance connected by ever so trivial a thread with the Marston-Roland business.

Once, whilst pouring forth my whole mind in the fresh flow of young-mannish confidence, his suddenly-flashing look startled—made me pause.

I was mentioning the very large sum in gold I was possessed of, and prepared to expend in furtherance of the sacred purpose that I was in Paraguay to achieve.

The round, beady eyes shot forth lightning, but the sinister light—I so interpreted for a moment its expression—the sinister light vanished as instantly as it gleamed forth.

“You notice,” said Señor Huerta, “that I cannot conceal my satisfaction at hearing how amply you are provided with the golden keys, which can alone unlock prison doors in Paraguay.”

I at once recognised the force of that argument, and intimated that I did.

“As I have before stated,” continued Huerta in his ordinary calm, suave tones, “it is only through Madame Lynch’s private cabinet that we can hope to reach those implacable prison-gates; and be assured that—

‘*On n’entre pas là, sans graisser le marteau,*’

and lavishly greasing the knocker too. However, we shall not show all our hand at first—not how many gold trumps we hold, I mean. Bring with you,” added Huerta, coolly, “bring with you to-morrow, at about noon, say, one thousand pounds in gold, and I will insure you an audience of the great lady.” . . .

“A thousand pounds!” exclaimed I, again startled out of my confiding simplicity. “A thousand pounds sterling for an audience only!—no promises made, no conditions settled!”

“My dear Mr. Smith, or Sabine,” rejoined Huerta,

"please to realise the critical position in which you are placed, and which I, out of friendship for Mr. Gotlieb, have consented to share with you. We are walking across a tremendous, unfathomable gulf, upon a narrow, slippery ledge. One false step would be destruction. We are consequently in no condition to haggle for a cheap success."

This was manifestly true, and I made no reply.

"One thing disturbs me," continued Huerta, his clear brow clouding ominously—"this strange story you have been relating about your Dr. Kirwan and two white herons. The man must be crazed. White herons, indeed! Is the Doctor loose of tongue?"

"No. He is a reticent, prudent man, and faithful as steel."

"*Tut—tut!* If he has really fallen into a trap, means would soon be found of subduing his 'faithfulness.' There are adepts in that science in Paraguay. He would soon be made to tell all he knew."

"Do you mean that the law of Paraguay authorises torture?"

"I mean that the will of President Lopez is the law in Paraguay. And this brings me to an essential condition of our implied contract, or understanding. If—by any indiscretion of this Doctor—of yourself—of your French friends—this, our little scheme to liberate the Marstons, should be got scent of by the President's secret agents (and their name is legion), I shall be at liberty, morally at liberty, to disown all concern in it, and you must pledge your solemn word to acquiesce in that denial. If you refuse, I do not stir in the matter. Nay, for before all things I love open dealing, I must be at liberty, should it be necessary for my own preservation, to denounce you myself."

Here was a ghastly outview, suddenly presented !

"Don't look so scared, my young friend," added Huerta, with gentle reassurance. "There is not the slightest fear of such a contingency arising—not the faintest. But come, a truce to business till noon to-morrow, when I shall be expecting you. We will now adjourn to dinner, and have a little music afterwards. I shall be happy to introduce you to Madame Huerta and my daughter."

I had slight appetite for dinner, but it would not have been well to refuse the invitation. Madame Huerta and her daughter were pleasant people. Madame was a French-woman born, and French was the family tongue, as it is in many South American city homes.

The singing was good, the wine superb, and I stayed late.

Music, wine, failed, however, to greatly lighten the dark cloud settling on my brain. De Veron and Penard were sitting up for me, but I was not in a communicative humour. I spoke but a few words, and at once withdrew to my room. Kirwan had not returned ! Another black portent !

I threw myself on the bed, but sleep, healthful sleep, was out of the question. If, overpowered by vinous fumes, I dropped off in snatches of feverish slumber, it was but as the sleep of fiends—filled with affrighting images of horror and despair. And amidst all the ghastly phantoms by which I was pursued, distracted, not one excited, maddened me as did the pale face, the faded form of Emily, the sad inquisition of whose mournful eyes seemed to ask why I, who had sworn to shield her life, had traitorously cast away my own—leaving her exposed to the cold world's scorn, its derisive pity !

Truly a night of horror. Excess in wine exaggerated and confused the real terrors of the situation. Yet I can truly say, it was not *personal* apprehension which for a time dominated, overwhelmed me. It seemed that I was, or soon to be, the spectator, the *audience*, of a fearful tragedy, involving my friends, but not myself. Strange perhaps, but strictly true.

I related in the morning to my French friends all that had occurred between me and the Advocate Huerta. They were as ominously impressed as myself.

"One thing, Messieurs, is quite clear," said I. "It would be sheer madness on your part, and could be of no possible service either to me or my prisoned friends, for you to remain in this accursed city. Let me entreat you to begone at once!"

"To do that, my friend," said M. de Veron, "even were we inclined to abandon you, is simply impossible. This morning—we rose much earlier than you—we thought a drive in the country might do us good, help to brace our nerves ; at all events, give us an appetite for breakfast. I therefore desired the head waiter to get some vehicle ready as quickly as possible. A sharp glance of surprise, of derision, shot from the fellow's sepulchral eyes, and he seemed about to vent his wonderment in words, but checked himself, and said he would inform the *padrone*, his master, of my request."

"My 'request,' not order," continued M. de Veron. "It was enough. My suspicions were fully confirmed. I knew we were prisoners, *gardés à vue*, as they say in France. We should have no vehicle. The master of the hotel hesitatingly admitted that it was so. But how was it, I asked, that our friend the Doctor was yesterday accommodated with a curricles? 'Ah, Señor Brown,' said

he, ‘you English don’t understand our ways. That was by superior order.’ Not understand,” exclaimed M. de Veron; “Holy Thunder, I understood too well! That our amiable *Docteur* was already dungeoned, and that we ourselves were enclosed in a *cul de sac*, from which the only outlet was into the same pleasant quarters. Well, the wine is drawn: it must be drunk.”

As the last words fell from M. de Veron’s lips, a youngish man glided into the room—I can only so describe his stealthy step—touched me on the shoulder, and pronouncing in a low whisper the words “from Señor Huerta,” requested in a louder tone to speak with me in private.

A lithe, swarthy—and, what shall I say?—foreboding-looking person was Antonio Gompertz. The lines on his saturnine face, especially about the thin, white, curling lips, were a tablet of evil augury that could not be misread. At all events I was so impressed. Possibly, however, this was an after interpretation, suggested by the light thrown on the facial tablet by subsequent events. Looking closely at him, I remember to have glimpsed his cavernous countenance—I fear I am expressing myself oddly—to have glimpsed his cavernous countenance as it glinted past an open door at Señor Huerta’s.

Antonio Gompertz did not beat about the bush. “You must hand to me,” he said, directly we were alone, “you must directly hand to me, this moment, the thousand pounds sterling in gold you were to have brought to Señor Huerta’s at noon to-day. It now wants barely half-an-hour of that time.”

“Well, but Señor Gompertz, this seems a hurrying of matters, that——”

“M. Smit, or whatever you chose to call yourself,” interrupted the villain, “I have no time to waste in words.

If you are wise, you will hand me over the gold at once. If you refuse—my mission is ended, and I leave forthwith."

What could I do—but with fingers trembling with rage, indignation, terror—yes, terror—count out the gold pieces and hand them to Huerta's peremptory messenger.

"It is well," he said, having deposited the two bags in the capacious inner pockets of his cloak. "It is well, and exactly at two o'clock you must be at Señor Huerta's with another bag containing two hundred pounds sterling in gold."

This was too much, and I broke out with, "What the devil do you mean? To swindle, rob me under the mask of friendship? It looks very like it."

"As you please," sneered the fellow. "As you please. Your friend the Doctor, I may tell you," he added, with a laugh, "is in custody!"

"Dr. Kirwan in custody! What, whose custody?"

"Not, strictly speaking, Christian custody," chuckled Gompertz. "The worthy man is subjected to a peculiar Paraguayan process, first invented by Dr. Francia, the founder of our illustrious line of Presidents, and one which, I believe, has once only failed of its purpose."

"Can you mean the rack?"

"O, *Sancta Maria*, no! We Paraguayans are far too civilised, too humane, to adopt the blundering expedients of old, used-up Europe. No physical torture is inflicted, not one bodily pang endured by the individual under 'question,' in the capital of Paraguay."

"What then is the peculiar Paraguayan process you speak of?"

"I am rather surprised," returned Gompertz, whose grating, distinctly-articulated words seemed to fall upon

my brain like drops of freezing water—"I am rather surprised you should not have heard of this truly Francian Institution. I forget whether Alexander Von Humboldt mentions it or not, but obscure writers do. It is a very interesting device, and shows great knowledge of human nature."

"Perhaps you will have the kindness to describe it!"

"Willingly, as I have some quarter of an hour to spare. But," added the callous devil's cub, "you have no wine here, and this hot weather invites to conviviality. Let us adjourn to the breakfast-room. Your French friends will, it can hardly be doubted, feel as keenly interested and *warned* as yourself."

We adjourned to the breakfast *salon*. Messieurs de Veron and Penard were still there, and judging by their looks as when we left them, wrapped in, encompassed by gloom, and thunder and eclipse.

If it were something we could have fought, grappled with, we might not have so utterly lost heart. To die in open conflict amidst the white smoke of battle is one thing; but to feel yourself hopelessly overborne by a peril which walketh in darkness, tangible to feeling but not to sight, is a very different and far more appalling affair.

That poor Kirwan was jailed did not surprise either M. de Veron or Penard; and Antonio Gompertz, with gleeful devilism, fluently proceeded:—"President Dr. Francia's finally adopted method of eliciting the truth, and the whole truth, from recalcitrant and perverse persons, is to be commended, not only as admirably adapted to secure the end in view, but for being limited to what may be fitly termed moral or mental suasion—say pressure. Dr. Francia had tried the old methods of physical torture, and like other practical professors of that system of

coercive persuasion—the Holy Roman Inquisition, for example—frequently failed to achieve his purpose, the interrogatory being sometimes arrested, just at the moment of apparent success, by the death of the dumb felon or traitor, as the case might be. Whereas, as said, our system has failed but once—the questioned man remaining alive. Yes; thanks to *Sancta Maria Purissima*, Holy Mother of Mercy,” continued the scoffing caitiff crossing himself, “ who, it is believed, inspired the President with the humane device now in practice—no one has since died under ‘the question.’ It may be that some have gone mad at the time or subsequently ; but you, Señors, will acknowledge that a statesman must deal with human nature in the gross or aggregate. Exceptional cases cannot be provided against.”

“ Less mocking *persiflage*, if you please,” I exclaimed, exasperated by the fellow’s insolence, his tiger-cat playing with his prey, as we could not but feel ourselves to be. “ Tell us, in as few words as possible, what the devilish device may be.”

“ You seem to be out of temper, Señor ; but you shan’t make me so. The *modus operandi*, beautiful in its simplicity, may be briefly described. There is a spacious cell in the State wing of the prison, known in the old barbarous days as the Chamber of Torture, now as the Hall of Conciliation.

“ In that hall there is now domiciled—and has been for some months past—a spotted male jaguar, remarkable for size, strength, and ferocity. Other wild animals, native and imported, have had the same office assigned them ; but at present the Warden at Conciliation Hall or Cell is, as I have told you, a huge spotted jaguar of remarkably ferocious character.

"Your friend, the Doctor, has no doubt been already introduced to this remarkable quadruped——"

"What!—how!" we exclaimed, with a burst of horror. "Flung to, devoured by a wild beast!"

"No—no—no—Holy Mother of Mercy—no! You jump too hastily at conclusions—a thing which this jaguar, like his predecessors in office, is carefully prevented from doing. Pray do not interrupt me again, as my time is growing short.

"The first introduction of your friend Kirwan to his future, four-footed companion was, no doubt, as it happens to every one similarly distinguished, a startling one. As he entered the cell, accompanied by a jailor, the always hungry, ravening beast would spring at him with a fierce roar. A thing to quicken the pulse of a man that! For a few hurried heart beats the newly introduced individual would not, perhaps, notice that the animal's spring was curbed by a strong massive chain, leaving the new comcr a space of four feet, where he can securely take his meals and his rest. He is gradually reassured, feeling that his life is still jealously cared for, guarded, by our most clement, illustrious President and ruler. I invite you, Messieurs, to drink, as I do, to his Excellency's health! Ha! Excellent wine this!"

"Go on, Señor," said I, "but I can guess what is coming. I do now remember to have read at Rio, in Mazo's Travels, of the Paraguayan Institution, as he terms it, which you are speaking of, but as he admits to have no authority for the statement, except rumour, I put it down as an invention of the President's enemies."

"It would be well if his Brazilian calumniators invented nothing worse concerning his Excellency. But to finish, for I must quickly begone.

"If your friend, Kirwan," continued Gompertz, "is an accurate judge of distances, he will even by this time have perceived that Monsieur Jaguar makes his closer personal acquaintance by at least four inches—the chain, so long as he chooses to remain perversely dumb, being lengthened, unobserved by the prisoner, one long link, daily. The fact, however, soon becomes palpable, and his nearer, still nearer approach is signalled, as one may say, by the voraciously-expectant tiger, in exultant, panting roars, continued through the night as well as day—rendering, it must be confessed, sleep almost impossible!"

"A device of the devil if there was ever one!" said Penard.

"I was myself witness," went on Gompertz, "in a most obstinate case. The man under question resisted till, to avoid the tiger's jaws, he was compelled to shrink himself up, as it were, into the smallest compass, in a corner of the cell. At last, when the half-famished beast, part fed with a morsel of raw beef as a whet, could touch, lick his face with its blood-dripping tongue, the man's perverse temper gave way, *his* tongue was loosened, the tiger was with difficulty dragged off, and the truth was elicited. I believe that obstinate culprit went mad immediately afterwards. You now are well *au fait* to the process," added Gompertz. "*Adios, Señors.*"

"One moment. You said the hellish device had failed in one case," said I; "how was that?"

"Oh, that was the case of your friend, Captain Marston. He now is a man whose obstinacy would, I believe, foil the very devil himself. Yes, and a very lamentable circumstance occurred the second day, I think t. was, after the Captain was introduced to Conciliation

Cell—lamentable, yet so ludicrous, that I can now scarcely help laughing on recalling it to mind. Poor Father Perez!"

"What of poor Father Perez?"

"The excellent Padre was the President's confessor. We all know what that means. Perez was his Excellency's trusted confidant. As much so and more than José Ramon the Governor of the State Prison, in which your friend the Doctor is now domiciled."

"It was, is, in his Excellency's opinion, of immense importance to force Captain Marston to give up the names of certain persons believed to be implicated in a diabolical plot aimed at the President's life. Father Perez was directed to try what promises and persuasion would effect, his exhortations to be enforced by tiger-demonstrations. A promising scheme; but holy saints—what a catastrophe! *

"Padre Perez, a brief, round, oily little man, exhorted, the jaguar roared, when, O saints and angels, fancy!—Captain Marston siezed hold of the Reverend Father by the nape of his neck and one of his legs, stepped forward and thrust the screaming Padre, before it was possible to prevent him, right into the jaguar's distended jaws.

"Fortunately, two jailors were present; and by dint of heavy blows and stabbing with their knives, the Reverend Father was rescued with life, but so severely torn and mangled that he will be, to the day of his death, a crippled invalid. In the mêlée, Captain Marston somehow got possession of one of the jailor's knives, a *cuchillo di Paragua*—a very formidable weapon—and with it gave the tiger, the present jaguar's predecessor, its death wound. He retained possession of the knife; and as he could not be deprived of it without killing him, or running the

risk of doing so—a particularly undesirable event—no jaguar would go near him, and he was removed as an utterly impracticable person from Conciliation Cell. A desperate, indomitable man is the Captain, and, *intra nos*, his handsome daughter is, after a feminine fashion, of course, his own true child. *Adios, Señors, again!* One more glass, however, for courtesy, and to our next fraternal meeting. *Adios!*"

Poor Kirwan! The tiger-torture would prove too much for him. He would tell all he knew, and who could blame the honest man? Every one is not blessed with the iron nerves of a Captain Marston.

"That tiger-torture story," said M. de Veron, "which I at first inclined to put down as an outrageous fiction, has a tinge of genuine Orientalism about it—recalls the glittering rather than gorgeous East, that classic land of cruelty, mystery, and murder, as much so now as in the grand days of the Akbars, Hyders, and other famous Asiatic Regalities. It reminds me, too, of an anecdote, related by Lamartine, I think, but am not sure, in his travels in the East. Some absolute Shah, Nadir Shah, if I remember rightly, having got a hated enemy in his power, enclosed the unfortunate man in an iron cage, just long enough for him to lie at length, and which by some mechanical contrivance contracted itself, at regular intervals, some five or six inches at a time, till the doomed victim was crushed to death.

"Lopez, who, though partly educated in England, strongly affects Oriental and Imperial styles of doing things—the Gotliebs, for example, told us, you may remember, that like the Cæsars, he writes or signs his supreme decrees in purple ink—must have adapted the infernal idea from Nadir Shah, with variations suitable

to his own purposes. Curious enough," continued philosophic M. de Veron, "how sympathetically despots recognise and adopt each other's ways, shake hands, as it were, however wide the chasm of ages which separates them. Louis Napoleon has, we know, a fanatical admiration of Julius Cæsar. As Christian men we are of course bound to hope," added Monsieur—with what strangers might have thought something of Voltairian tone and emphasis—"as Christian men, we are of course bound to hope the modern Julius Cæsar will not have his Brutus. Happily there is no fear of that. The race in emasculated France must have died out——"

"Felice! Felice! You! you!—is it really Felice!" These and the like were the exclamations which suddenly broke in upon M. de Veron's somewhat dismal dissertation.

It was indeed Felice! The sudden apparition of the Carib girl not only lifted us to our feet, but fell upon us like a sunburst from a wintry sky, illumining for a moment the deep gloom by which we were encompassed.

The girl looked thin, haggard, and the old stubborn hopefulness, if I may so express it, which distinguished her, had faded into utter despondency. This was so plainly manifest that we required no assurance in words that she was the bearer of evil tidings.

Her story was soon told. Miss Marston, her brother, Roland, and Felice herself, were seized almost immediately after they arrived, and lodged in the State Prison. No reason was assigned, and they had not since been in any way questioned. They passed the day, if they chose, with Captain Marston in his cell, were abundantly supplied with eatables and drinkables, and Felice was permitted to leave the prison once a week for a brief time, during which she knew herself to be closely

watched, guarded. Lopez was absent with his army, and it was believed that, on his return, something decisive would be done in the Marston case.

Except that our friends were as well in bodily health as could be expected, Felice had little more to tell.

She had heard of our arrival the day before from Dr. Kirwan, now a State Prisoner, and separately lodged. He had been subject to torture, Felice had heard, and his mind appeared to be giving way. No wonder! "There is no hope—no chance," added the affectionate Indian, the stoicism of her nature suddenly giving way, and bursting into tears. Her mistress and relatives—all would perish in prison, or by some swifter means of death. There could be no doubt of it; and she, Felice, had now come to entreat us, from the Marstons, from my friend Roland himself, to hasten at once from the accursed city, if that chance remained. It was simply utter madness for any of us to have dared such a desperate venture.

The door opened, and a sombre-looking, dark-habited fellow, reminding one of the Roman Inquisition Apparitors we read of, when children, in Anna-Maria romances. He looked meaningly at Felice, not uttering a word. This is part of the "silent" system invented by Doctor Francia, to shroud his ubiquitous authority in mysterious terror.

"My time is finished," trembled from the lips of poor Felice, whose fierce spirit had been, it was only too plain, completely subdued; "I obey!" and with a mournful, pitying glance at us, and a mute gesture of despair, she left the room, following the apparitor.

Assuredly we had now not only "supped" full of horrors, but breakfasted, dined on them in plentiful re-

galement! It is time, too, I should set out with the two hundred pounds in gold, for Señor Huerta's.

I rose to leave. There was nothing for it but to play out the almost desperate game. "You have," I said, addressing my French friends, "you have secreted, in view of *accidents*, all the gold I have left!"

"Certainly, with Adolphe Picard, whom we introduced to you. He is a countryman, and, we *think*, faithful and discreet."

Again the door suddenly opened, and Antonio Gompertz presented himself. "I was passing by," he said, in his softest, snakiest tone, "and thought it might be as well to remind you, Señor Sabine, that it is close upon two o'clock."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN DURANCE VILE.

I MET Señor Huerta just within his outer gate, which opened into what he grandiosely called his Ambulacrum ; in reality, a grass path enclosed by, at that season, flowering trees, and overarched by climbing, twisting orchidæ.

Huerta seemed absorbed, anxious ; and when he spoke, the tone was stern, peremptory. “ You have the gold ? ” he sharply queried. “ You have ! That is well ! Follow me ! ”

I obeyed, and we were presently seated in the office room, where I had before held converse or counsel with him.

“ Now, Señor Sabine,” he abruptly began, relaxing nothing of his sternness of tone and demeanour ; “ now, Señor Sabine, you ask me to aid you in the deliverance from custody of the Marston family, and you offer me a large sum in gold, of which you have now brought me an instalment, as the price of my traitorous assistance ? ”

Traitorous assistance ! What could Huerta mean by that ? My brain was in a whirl, its reasoning power thrown out of gear, as one may say, paralyzed, stunned by the thunder-claps which had in such quick succession fallen upon me, and I simply blurted out——

“ Quite true, Senor Huerta ; an instalment, as you say, of the price I shall willingly pay for the liberation of my friends ! ”

Was ever silliest of birds caught in a trap so transparent, openly displayed? But there, the result would have been the same, if I had replied with the craftiness of an Old Bailey Barrister.

"You have heard, Señor Arguellas," said Huerta, addressing a chief of Polizia, who suddenly made his embroidered appearance from behind a high screen. "You have heard, Señor Arguellas, and know your duty." So saying, and without vouchsafing me a look, even of contempt, Señor Huerta vanished.

For me, I was too stupefied to speak, to stammer out the slightest objection to the personal liberties forthwith taken with me by Señor Arguellas, and half a dozen satellites, whom a whistle summoned to his assistance.

By those gentlemen I was pinioned, handcuffed, walked off to a prison-van in attendance, and before, I should say, ten minutes had elapsed, one of the State Prison jailors had signed a receipt for Señor Sabine, *alias* Smith, and I was securely locked up in one of the State cells!

Mere phantasmagoria, nothing more! I was dreaming. There, opposite to me, sat M. de Veron and Penard. They shook hands with me. Why so? Evidently because I had taken too much wine at breakfast! Yes; and that was why I felt so giddy—sick—sick! Penard caught me or I should have fallen on the floor.

No phantasmagoria, Robert Sabine! No illusion! young gentleman! Hard, iron fact! De Veron, Penard, and noble self were prisoned—lunatics, shall I say? prisoned *à perpetuité*, it never, I had heard, having been known that any one, once clutched in a Paraguayan President's despot grasp, had been liberated from it—been seen abroad again, in open, free life! Not one! Should Lopez, indeed, be defeated in his death struggle with

Brazil, the Comte D'Eu would, no doubt, if we were still in the flesh, *liberatable*, set us and the Marstons free, but that was a very remote possibility.

Shakespeare remarks that the greatest of philosophic poets, however they may have writ the style of Gods, could not have endured the toothache patiently ; and, assuredly, we, who could not be accused of affecting poetic-philosophism, did not shake hands with adverse fate with the sublime heroism which we know from historic story books the strong-souled man always displays, when subjected to undeserved calamity.

I, myself, fell immeasurably short of what we are taught to expect of the typical Englishman under such circumstances. And my excellent Parisians, even M. de Veron, who I had heard spout Corneille's heroics—the Cid, for example—with such ringing emphasis, the passages, especially, which glorified heroic suffering, fell, like myself and Penard, lamentably short of the beau-ideal. The plain fact was—it may as well out—that after venting our somewhat womanish rage in undignified epithets, maledictions, *et cætera*, we all then got more or less—Shame, remorse, like Sterne's Recording Angel, has dropt a tear upon the abominable word, and blotted it out for ever.

The truth was, owing, I fancied, to Huerta's interposition, prompted by his anxiety to keep my tongue quiet as possible, we were served towards evening with an almost sumptuous repast, and wine à *discretion* ; in which moral attribute our deficiency, always sufficiently obvious, was, I confess, more distinctly marked on that night than ever.

The table was spread under the supervision of the Governor of the jail, José Ramon—a tall, stern, soldierly man, some forty years of age, and of iron visage, though

curtly-civil in speech. In reply to M. de Veron, he drily remarked that the fate of either or all of us might be decided at any moment, that very night, possibly. If that was a jest, as we hoped, it was a very ghastly one.

We had no stomach for eating, but a rapidly increasing appetite for drink, a growing unappeasable thirst, requiring no end of wine to but partially slake. The reader may be shocked, but can scarcely be surprised at this, when he considers the inflaming memories called into being by the awful position in which we found ourselves.

Well, time and the hour run through the wildest, most obstreperous, as well as roughest day. Evening, night, and bed time came at last. There were two rough pallets in the cell, and, more by accident than choice, I and Penard turned in together, and were quickly asleep.

It was no jest, grim or gentle, of José Ramon's. I was awoke by him and two janitors, just as the grey dawn was struggling in at the barred window of the cell.

Ramon's message was brief and terse. I alone, of all my companions, was condemned to death, the execution to take place immediately. He held before me a strip of paper, or parchment, on which my sentence was inscribed in purple characters, and subscribed by the President.

How shall I describe the feeling of horror which the announcement, alike overwhelming in itself and in its suddenness, evoked? I could *not* describe it, and for the sufficient reason that I really felt no emotion of—what shall I say?—no living, breathing emotion of horror, terror. I felt as if *I* had no immediate concern in the matter, that my person, indeed, which seemed to be suddenly becoming rigid, turning into stone, was to suffer

capital execution, but that *I—I*, Robert Sabine, that continuity of consciousness which constitutes Self—the I am—had nothing to apprehend.

This was surely supernatural ; and the thought flashed upon me that it was possibly a merciful provision of Providence, designed to sustain the fortitude of doomed victims during the last moments of mortal agony.

It was equally strange that my two companions, whose pallid faces the dawning light dimly revealed, remained soundly asleep. About to rudely awaken Penard, I was harshly rebuked by the stern Governor of the Prison. “Why disturb your companions ?” he said. “*Their* time will come soon enough ! Be quick ! We have no time to spare. It was well you did not undress yourself last evening.”

Still tormented by the inflammatory thirst I have spoken of, I asked for a draught of wine, or of water, not very distinctly, for my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth.

The chief jailor shook his head, and motioned to the two janitors, or sentinels, to move on. “You will not feel thirst many minutes longer,” he muttered with a mocking smile.

We were quickly outside, in front of the jail. The ghastly guillotine, patterned upon that I had once shudderingly beheld in action in the Place de la Roquette, Paris, stood up in black relief against the glorious north-east sky, from which, fast rising above the encircling houses, the sun looked down upon the place of death, lighting up with intenser malignity the dingy devilism which gleamed in the eager faces of the assembled crowd, amongst whom I distinctly recognised Huerta, and his fellow-fiend, Antonio Gompertz.

Was I to be guillotined, or shot ? It appeared doubtful

by which method I was to be done to death, for in front of the scaffold stood ranged a firing party, to whom I heard the order given to load and make ready.

A few minutes afterwards I was blindfolded and commanded to kneel down, but such was my confusion of mind that I could not be sure whether or not I had previously been made to ascend the scaffold steps !

Crash ! Bang ! It was all over ! I had been either shot or guillotined ! Both methods, I suspected, had been employed to finish my earthly career. I was dead, finally done for. There could be no doubt of that—aye, and buried too, with wondrous celerity ; for did I not read (most confounding marvel of all) the inscription, painted in purple characters, upon my tombstone :—“Here lieth CIVIS ANGLICANUS SUM, alias Robert Sabine. Aged twenty years.”

There could consequently be no mistake about it ; but what distracted, tormented me most, was that intolerable, maddening thirst !

Presently I saw the villain Gompertz about to pass me, carrying a large jar of wine, or water, it mattered not which.

Fortunately he passed close by me, as my legs, paralyzed in death, would not obey my living will ; they felt as if tied together.

Seizing Gompertz, I demanded a drink from his jar. The scoundrel refused. There was a struggle, and I pommelled him savagely, he remonstrating, swearing at me in a sort of polyglot abuse, partly English, partly French. “*Sacre bleu !* Sabine, are you mad ! *Cent diables !* this is too much ! Malediction ! Curse your English box ! *Je te dis que* there is no wine left or water —*non plus !* *O Sapristi !* this shall not do ! *Sais tu*

Torogne enrage ! that your cursed hammer-fist is breaking *mes dents* ! my teeth ! Leave off, will you ! No ! Hundred thousand devils ! *Eh bien !* patience no longer !” and the fellow, turning round, seized me by the throat, and fiercely shook me—awake !

Yes ; I had been dreaming, and in that dream fighting furiously with my bed-fellow, Penard, whose face was covered with blood, and one eye, I saw by the full light of day streaming into the cell, was already fast closing, or setting in blue and yellow effulgence !

I apologised, of course, which apology was but growlingly accepted by my maltreated, irate friend. “Thunder of Heaven !” he savagely muttered, as wiping the blood from his mouth on the bed-sheet, and with tentative finger along his gums endeavouring to ascertain how many of his teeth had been knocked out, “was there ever such a savage at box in his sleep ! Wine again ! Oh, *nom de Dieu !*—two gone at least ! You kicked the table over in your infernal dream, and broke all the bottles ! *Parbleu !*”

This was true, and accounted for the crash ! bang ! which I had dreamed to be the guillotine or shooting party in action.

There was fortunately a jar of water in the cell ; my thirst was soon in part assuaged, and Penard, having ascertained that he had only lost one of his teeth—not indeed lost that, as he found it on the bed-quilt—he gradually grumbled himself off to sleep again. I also slept untormented by dreams ; and when at about ten o’clock we were awakened for breakfast, all the signs of the evening’s and night’s doings and dreams, except those imprinted upon Penard’s battered frontispiece, had been cleared away, and so far the sky was again serene.

We were unvisited for the next seven or eight days, save by the jailors or turnkeys, as we should call them. Even Felice, who was allowed the rules of the prison—that is, she could roam at will about the corridors within certain limits—did not look in. Communication with us had been, we found, forbidden, for the present.

One morning the Governor was accompanied by a young man of singularly interesting aspect. His age I guessed to be about four-and-twenty. There was a mournfulness in the expression of his fine countenance—a sort of placid, moon-lit melancholy, which greatly impressed me. He was habited in black velvet, and appeared to be on very friendly terms with José Ramon, the Governor.

"I have, at his earnest request," said Ramon, "brought this young gentleman, a sailor, artist, musician, to see you. He will paint your portraits, if you will give him leave."

"Younger even than I," said the youthful stranger, in a mild, low voice, and steadfastly regarding me; "and, as I am, the life-dweller in a foreign prison. It is sad, very sad—for you, sir, I mean, not for me! Are you a native of Devonshire?"

"No, I am Hampshire born, but many parts of Devon are familiar to me."

"Ha! Sidmouth, do you know Sidmouth? No? I was born, reared there to youthhood. My name is Charles Manvers. Yours I know—Robert Sabine. You are rich, too," he added, reflectively, "Felice tells me; and a beautiful maiden mourns your absence in England—England, which you will never see again. Never! Never! Never! It is very sad! Shall we be friends? Life-long friends! It seems to me already that I have known you for years."

I was a good deal affected by the young Englishman's singular speech and manner, and I said I should be glad to be favoured with his friendship, at which he seemed much pleased. He scarcely noticed M. de Veron or Penard ; and after a stay of about five minutes, he left with the Governor, who on going out said, "Charles shall have leave to visit you as often as he pleases."

De Veron told me that Ramon had, in a confidential undertone, intimated that Charles was, upon some points, very eccentric—in other words, somewhat touched on the brain.

The next day Antonio Gompertz honoured us with a visit. We had predetermined to be civil to him. He was full of explanations, apologies, and assurances, that however appearances might be against him, he, Señor Huerta, had acted throughout, was still acting zealously, in our true interest. It would not be long, he said, before we were convinced of that. "Señor Huerta was glad," the rascal added, not without the ghost of a blush rising on his saffron visage, hardened in villainy as he was, "that the large amount of gold I must still have been in possession of, had escaped the search of the Polizia. You were wise," he said, "to secrete it, no doubt with some confidential friend."

"I have small confidence in friends," was my reply ; "but the gold *is* securely placed !"

Gompertz was glad of that; and if, at any time, I entertained any suspicion that I was likely to be defrauded, duped, by the person or persons to whom I had intrusted so large a sum, Señor Huerta, and he himself, would be happy to afford me their best assistance.

As he was speaking, Charles Manvers looked in. A sharp glance of mutual recognition passed between him

and Gompertz—that of the young Englishman expressive of uttermost scorn, contempt; that of Gompertz, the half-brazen, half-craven look of a conscious rascal, fully aware that the man, whose eye he shrinkingly encountered, knew him to be a thorough scoundrel.

"You have company, I see," said Manvers, "I will look in again, by-and-by."

"Ramon," said Gompertz, "has then introduced his half-crazy *protégé* to you. That is a mark, I am glad to tell you, of especial favour!"

"Indeed! How comes it that Ramon has taken such a liking to 'Charles,' a perpetual prisoner, as he calls himself?"

"The reason is simple enough. Ramon has one soft, very soft place in his iron composition. That soft place is his extravagant love for a young and only daughter. Her mother died in giving Juanita birth. This is, I repeat, Ramon's one romantic craze. Were remediless, imminent death to befall his child, Ramon's life would not be worth a week's purchase. He would most likely die by his own hand. Now this 'Charles' is a very clever fellow at taking likenesses, and he has painted Juanita to the life, a charming child it must be admitted, as she grows older, becoming more developed with each succeeding year. Juanita is now about eight years of age. Charles has been an inmate of the jail some six years. An odd whimsicality of Ramon's is, that he constantly wears, suspended round his neck, but of course concealed beneath his dress, five miniatures on ivory, beautifully done, there is no denying that, of Juanita, from her second till her eighth year. The child is absent in the country just now, but will return next week, when as Charles, of whom she herself is very fond, has proposed

to Ramon's huge delight, she is to be painted sitting on papa's knee. A foolish foible this," added Gompertz with a jaundiced sneer, "of an iron Jail Janitor."

We saw nothing foolish or foiblish, if there is such a word, in it. "Upon what charge, or what pretence of a charge," I asked, "is Charles Manvers confined à *perpetuité* in this accursed jail?"

"I scarcely know," said Gompertz. "He got purposely, I believe, into a quarrel, a fighting quarrel, with one or more of the late President's chief officers, and was of course forthwith entombed. His present Excellency," added the fellow, with his usual diabolic chuckle, "is far too reverential a son to liberate any one whom his father deemed worthy of bonds!"

"The young man," I said, "appears to be resigned, reconciled to his fate."

"Yes, and that is the queerest part of the story. I don't understand the matter clearly, but it seems that 'Charles,' crazy Charles, in a manner cherishes imprisonment, because it prevents him from sullying his soul, he thus expressed it, with the innocent blood of two persons, one of whom he madly loves, while for the other he feels the tenderest friendship. I repeat that I do not understand the whole galimathias of the thing, nor do I wish to do so. Señor Huerta does, and, I fancy, knows more about the affair than 'Charles' suspects he does. I, and the half lunatic," concluded Gompertz, "felt from the first an instinctive dislike of each other. That does not disturb my slumbers. Adios, Señors! You will remember, Señor Sabine, my hint as to the depositing of your gold, should there be any attempt at fraud. We should baffle it be assured. Adios once more."

Charles Manvers invited me a few days afterwards to

look over, were I so inclined, his heart-treasures, as he designated them. I should examine, peruse them alone, he said.

His heart-treasures were portraits, unmistakeably drawn from life, and more truly, faithfully, than, in the present phase of the art, could have been done by photography.

Two series of portraits especially rivetted my attention and interest. The first was that of a youthful matron, in not the first, but an early flush of wifehood—a very interesting lady, handsomely dressed, who, with a cheering smile of fondness, contemplated her infant son, gambolling on the carpet. It scarcely needed the child-lines—Dr. Watt's, I believe—inscribed in diamond-hand beneath the likeness,

“Who ran to catch me when I fell
And kissed the place to make it well?
My mother,”

to convince me that “Charles” was the child gambolling on the floor.

There were several portraits of this lady, but that which chiefly rivetted my attention was the last of the series. The lady, pale with the hue of death—a paleness illumined by those only potent ministers, Faith and Hope—lay extended upon her death-bed. By that death-bed knelt, in reverential awe, her son, not now a gambolling child, but a youth of some ten or perhaps twelve years of age. “My mother's last blessing on her son” was inscribed beneath this painting in the diamond-characters I have spoken of. A noble son, a noble mother! I murmured to myself, as, not without emotion, I closed the case containing this precious series.

The next was a number of portraits, taken at successive ages, as, Gompertz said, the likenesses of Ramon's daughter

had been. They were not, however, duplicates of Juanita's miniatures, she being, Gompertz had incidentally mentioned, a dark Creole beauty.

This child, this child-girl, was fairer, much fairer, than any girl or boy I had seen in South America, not excepting those born of European parents, before their parents had become acclimatised, impregnated by the burning kisses of a southern sun.

Her hair fell in ringlet-waves of lustrous gold on shoulders of ivory ; her complexion was illumined Parian marble, tinted with roseate hues of summer dawn. A most beauteous creation of God's ! How admirably, too, had the cunning artist, in his labour of love, delineated the development of that budding loveliness, till it expanded into the youthfully-mature beauty of radiant girlhood ! This portrait, this series of portraits, enshrined, I felt, the secret of Charles Manvers' life. On the back of one of the miniatures, the latest, the diamond-pointed pen or pencil had written, "Evangeline ! the ocean to the river of my thoughts, which ended all."

When I again conversed with Charles Manvers, which was not till after the lapse of several days, I did not speak in words of his heart-treasures, but he seemed to intuitively read my thoughts.

"Would you," he said, with something of a brightness, after some minutes' pause, "would you like to hear the story of my life ? It is as yet known only to myself—if to myself ! "

"I should be glad to do so. Would he favour me with his confidence at once ! Who knew but that good might result ! "

"No, not now," he said. "To-morrow, I shall take you to my heart."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SINGULAR BOY.

"I MENTIONED to you before," Charles Manvers began, "that my native place was Sidmouth, Devon. The country about Sidmouth, the environs, are remarkably beautiful. I have been lately sketching some of my favourite haunts from memory, but I do not remember much of the people, of the habitants thereabout."

"We dwelt apart, in an isolated cottage *ornée*, picturesque both in itself and its surroundings. Ours was a naval family, had been so for generations. Devonshire has, you know, been always fertile in sea heroes. I do not mean in saying that, to insinuate that my forefathers belonged to that glorious band, though my grandsire, third luff of the *Temeraire*, and killed in the great fight, was highly reported of to Admiral Collingwood by Captain Harvey.

"My father served as middy in the same battle, on board the *Royal Sovereign*. He possessed remarkable talent for descriptive word-painting; and I used to listen, when a mere child, with passionate interest, not only to his vivid narrative of the doings of the British ships which composed the long line of red lightning and white thunder, but of minor fights in which he had been engaged, he having served till the Napoleonic war had been finally wrestled down, not at sea only, that was never doubtful, but on land.

"Like England's great sea hero, he cherished a personal hatred of Frenchmen, whom, it may be, he irrationally confounded with the pitiless, conscienceless Corsican Destroyer.

"I," continued Manvers, with a smile (I may remark that, although his face was not turned directly away—he sat in profile—Manvers did not exactly appear to be addressing me. He discoursed as one who was recalling aloud to himself the chief incidents of his life, almost unconscious of an auditor. I did not, consequently, once interrupt the current of his spoken memories)—"I," continued Manvers, with a smile, an *introspective* smile, "have inherited a comparatively faint impression of that fierce dislike. This is why I have not been, am not, so cordial as your manner has seemed to intimate I ought to be with your French friends. I have ever been," he self-reflectively went on, "a child of impulse. Mere reasoning has slight controlling power over me. A grave deficiency, no doubt; yet one I cannot regret, since to it, if I owe the calamities, such as they were, of my life—being imprisoned here is not for me a calamity—I have been also indebted for its exquisite delights, its ecstacies of sympathy and love.

"Love even for a mother is not, could not be, the result of reasoning; and that love—the sunshine of my infancy and early boyhood—has never ceased to shed its divine radiance, its holy, calming power, over the darkest, most afflictive hours of my still young life, as measured by the slow, creeping clock of time.

"Another love," continued the low, sad, and now tremulous voice—"another love, more intense, perhaps, if less ethereal—tainted with earthliness—which has illumined with its dazzling, changeful light the best

years of my existence, was born of impulse. Reason would have stifled it remorselessly in its birth. Could that have been well, feeling, as all sensitive souls must, how infinitely better it is to have loved and lost, than never to have loved !

"I have a religious faith," Manvers continued, in a sprightlier tone, "I have a religious faith in the enduring influence of '*la grande passion*,' as the French phrase it, though according to my experience—a very limited experience it is true—French nature, French male nature at all events, is utterly incapable of feeling love in its true power. I have, I say, a religious faith in the enduring influence of the divine passion, as I prefer calling it. That is, I believe, that he who has once felt it, can never afterwards, however fallen and degraded, become utterly irredeemably bad. A chord of his spiritual being has been struck, which will never wholly cease to vibrate. To quote Thomas Moore—how I used to sun myself in the brilliantly-sensuous verses of the Irish poet! I do not so highly appreciate them now—to quote Moore, I was about to remark with reference to this faith or superstition of mine, I believe—

" ' You may break, you may ruin, the vase at your will,
But the scent of the roses will cling round it still.'

"I am telling the story of my life," my wayward young friend resumed, after taking a glass of wine, "I am telling the story of my life—scarcely worth listening to I fear, if well told—most vilely, disconnectedly.

"I have not yet reached the first turning point in that life, my father's death, and am already glibly discussing its catastrophe—its moral catastrophe, &c. I must, in common parlance, try back.

"The gaut war over, my father, who had just previously passed for the grade of lieutenant, was cast, in nautical phrase, like hundreds of others, high and dry ashore.

"He had little private fortune, and at once determined to engage in the Merchant Naval Service. He soon obtained employment; and in about nine or ten years, found himself captain and part owner of the barque *Neptune*, a first-class ship in the South American trade.

"He then married, most happily, fortunately. I do not mean fortunately in a money, mercenary sense. It was far from that. His bride was rich only in the precious gifts of a pure and noble spirit, enshrined in a frame not unworthy of its divine tenant, and adorned, illumined, by a grace, a sweetness, like the emanations of a perfect soul, which compelled the love, the admiration, the tenderest sympathy of all who knew her.

"I may not dwell upon that early phase of my life. Its sudden evanishment plunged me, for a time, young as I was—eleven years old only, but precocious in mind and body—into outer darkness, and well nigh drove me to the madness of despair. Her solemn blessing, her last utterance upon earth, commanding me to the merciful protection of the All-Merciful, which seemed to toll through the encompassing darkness with mournful yet uplifting consolatory warning, saved me from mental wreck! Yet I have never, I sometimes think, fully recovered from the shock. I was an only child, my mother my only teacher, preceptor. To her I owe the cultivation of what little talent I possess in drawing, painting, music, and my taste for poetic literature."

The broken, almost sobbing utterance of Charles

Manvers ceased, and some minutes of meditative silence, unprofaned by me, had passed when he resumed.

"The shock was sudden, terrific ! I mean the tidings which came to us of my father's death—precursor, with no long interval between, of my mother's.

"My father had been absent for an unusually long period, nearly seven months. The *Neptune* had sailed for South America, and was to bring home a cargo of mahogany from Honduras. We had, of course, heard from him by letter, but not for the last two months, though several postal steamers had arrived from South American ports during the time. This, I saw, fidgetted, indeed alarmed my mother, for my father used to write by every opportunity which presented itself. He was ill, she feared—her solicitude assumed no darker hue than that.

"That fear would soon be confirmed or dissipated. A few lines in the *London Shipping Gazette* announced that the *Neptune*, homeward bound from South America with a cargo of mahogany, had been spoken with by a steamer within a few days' sail of Plymouth, from which port she hailed.

"We were hourly expecting my father, when the county paper was brought, as usual, to the cottage. Instantly unfolding it, my mother looked eagerly for the ship intelligence column, found, glanced at it ; then, with a piteous scream, and throwing her arms wildly round my neck (I was sitting by her side), she fainted.

"With the servant's aid I carried her to bed, and medical assistance was, of course, instantly sent for.

"The paragraph in the newspaper, which smote her mortally, was very brief. I have it by heart :—

" 'A SAD CATASTROPHE.—The *Neptune*, laden with

mahogany, has arrived in port, and, we regret to hear, brings news of the death of Captain Manvers. A man had fallen overboard in the Bay of Honduras, and Captain Manvers, whose intrepid humanity is well known, jumped after him in the hope of saving his life. The bay was swarming, it appears, with sharks, and both Captain and man were almost instantaneously seized and devoured by the voracious monsters !'

"This terrible news was confirmed by letter from the *Neptune's* owners. My mother never completely rallied from the blow, and in less than six months she was in her coffin. Theirs was one life, one love, one hope, and should have been one grave !

"My father—reckoning his share in the *Neptune*—left about fifteen hundred pounds, which sum was invested by relatives for me in the English Funds. I have never once claimed the interest, so that there must now be a considerable number of unclaimed dividends due to me. I have made a will," added Manvers with a sigh, "which Ramon has undertaken to forward to the legatee, Evangeline, at my death. Should I survive her, the principal and interest will go to her children, if she has any, if not, to her husband. You stare, Mr. Sabine—smile, a doubtfully-credulous smile. I am a phsyiological riddle, sir, but I shall presently furnish you with the *mot d'enigme*—if you have patience to listen, that is, to the end of this prosy narrative.

"I was intended for a sea-life, for which I had, or imagined I had, a decided liking. Certainly I was very fond of being in the water—at bathing, boating, swimming, diving, in which accomplishments I was very, very early in life an adept. I was strong, too, in frame; far more muscular than my appearance indicated.

"A friend of my father's, Captain Sutton, had succeeded to the command of the *Neptune*. He invited me to make my first voyage with him.

"I consented with reluctance, though I felt it would be positively suicidal, and wickedly opposed to my mother's solemn admonitions, to mope about Sidmouth—my sole occupation, when I thought myself unobserved, to sit by her grave in the quiet country churchyard, playing on my flute the airs, the sacred airs, she best loved, and fancying—almost believing—I was, as in life, accompanying her sweet, tender voice, now softly piercing up from the cold, dark tomb ! It must have been fancy, of course.

"I have previously told you," he abruptly broke off to say, perhaps in reply to something in my look, "I have previously told you that my mother's death temporarily bereft me of reason ; that I, indeed, sometimes doubt if I have ever fully recovered it. Others think so too. They may be right. That as yet unhanged villain Gompertz is, I have been told, in the habit of calling me—not in my hearing—oh no !—the half-crazy Englishman !

"Let me try to go on quietly. It soothes, uplifts me, to thus confide the secrets of my troubled soul to, as I believe, nay, am sure, a sympathising young English friend. He too, though younger, much younger than myself, steeped to the lips in undeserved calamity, doomed to linger out weary life in a foreign dungeon, a stranger for evermore to those spells of power—Home, Peace, and Love ! It is very, very sad."

As the last sentences fell slowly from his lips, Manvers turned towards and looked me earnestly, compassionately, full in the face. "I am not sure that it is so written in the book of Fate. I could, I *know*, deliver you ; but that

deliverance," he went on, musingly, muttering to himself, "but that deliverance would involve my own, and that might probably—most probably would—assure the damnation of my own soul. My destiny would be rent eternally from my sainted mother's—I should never see her again—never!—who so lovingly expects me. No! I cannot, will not, set him and his friends free," he added, turning away and resuming his profile position. "No! so fearful a sacrifice cannot be required of me!"

"Mad! unquestionably mad!" thought I. "Yet what a singular method in his madness!"

Manvers was silent for a few moments, striving, I saw, to re-knit the broken thread of narrative.

"I have it," he presently said. "I accepted Captain Sutton's offer, and shipped with him as a naval cadet. He so designated me in the *Neptune's* books.

"The *Neptune* again sailed to the South American coast, and was again to return freighted with mahogany.

"The voyage was without noticeable incident. We finally reached Honduras Bay, and were soon busy taking in cargo—a tedious process. The men on board pointed out to me the spot where my father perished. That part of the bay was not a favourite fishing ground of sharks, though, guided by some mysterious instinct, they sometimes appeared in shoals. Whilst the *Neptune* was there, I never saw the fins of more than one of the monsters glittering above the surface of the water.

"Strange, at least you may deem it strange, was the hot, vehement longing that possessed me to grapple with, rip up, kill one at least of the sea-devils. I had been assured it could be done; that expert divers, negroes, as a rule, would not hesitate for a sufficient reward to plunge into the sea, if sure there was but one thereabout—a fact

easily ascertained—attack, kill it, and were rarely, if ever, unsuccessful.

“Captain Sutton told me how it was done. The negro-assailant, armed with a strong sharp knife of the bowie-pattern, dives at a little distance from the shark—a male is preferred, and the shark sexes are easily distinguishable—seizes it with one hand underneath, and as the monster turns partly on its side to catch its prey in its terrific jaws, rips him up from tail to gullet !

“The victor must then not lose a moment in getting back to his ship or boat—the scent of the animal’s blood being sure to draw with arrowy swiftness to the spot, every shark within a quarter of a mile’s distance.

“I had one day an opportunity of testing the truth of this Negro, *versus* Shark, story. One of the native labourers, a powerful negro-slave employed in loading the ship, was pointed out to me as a skilful, fearless shark-fighter.

“I spoke to him, and he at once joyfully agreed to try his fortune against *one* shark, whenever I chose, for a reward of twenty dollars. An opportunity presented itself the very next day. Over the side, unhesitatingly, went the Black, the sharp knife held firmly in his massive jaws. The startled, yet voraciously eager shark darted towards, missed him of course, and was itself quickly ripped up, and floating, white belly upwards, in a sea, crimsoned by its own life-blood.

“The exploit had been deftly accomplished. The Black lost no time in regaining the deck of the *Neptune*. I warmly congratulated, paid him, and purchased the dripping knife at a fancy price.

“The Negro,” said Manvers, with sudden change of tone and aspect, all colour vanishing from his face, and

visibly trembling in every limb, as if shaken with a strange terror, "the negro parted reluctantly with the knife. It had been charmed by an Obeah man, and whilst remaining in his own possession would be a sure weapon for defence and also offence. Parted with, it would be a curse to its possessor—*ultimately, an instrument in his hands of murder!*"

A still more fearful shudder accompanied the last eight words. I remained silent. What could I say? That the flamed brain was again manifesting symptoms of infirmity? To so speak *could* answer no good or wise purpose.

Manvers, still moody, excited in speech and manner, presently resumed. "I laughed, at the time, at the Negro and his Obeah rubbish; and it was years afterwards before it gleamed darkly through the thickly scribbled palimpsest of memory, in lurid light, in terrible significance!"

"I had, indeed," continued the inexplicable young man, "almost forgotten the Obeah prophecy—but you, Sabine—your friends, the Marstons, cruelly incarcerated here, have revived it in fearful ominous intensity! I saw your friends," Manvers hurriedly went on, before I could interpose a word, "I saw your friends yesterday for the first time since you have been here. They are deeply concerned for you; but pretty well in health themselves, except the Doctor, *his* intellect seems to be giving way, and Miss Marston! A splendid creature is that gay lady, and I have no doubt superb, magnificent in soul and mind as in person. The springs of *her* young life are, I greatly fear, touched corruptibly. Nothing can save her, I feel convinced, but the Lake waters and the air of the South American Sanatorium amongst the hills. You never

heard of that natural *al fresco* hospital for the else incurable? Not likely that you should. Your friend, Roland—a relative, is he not?"

"Yes, a cousin, some three times removed, and infinitely better than that, a friend, true as steel, reliable as death."

"I am sure of that. His is the unmistakeable ring of the true English metal. Confinement chafes and frets him; but his real concern, the heart-grief which consumes him, is the seeing his beloved fading, fading away visibly before his eyes.

"And you, he, Captain, Lieutenant Marston, the Doctor, Ellen Marston, are my country folk! D——n!" he wildly went on, "why am I subjected to this pressure, almost compelling me to lay murder on my soul! And simply to free you from this vile bondage!"

"Mr. Manvers," said I, "if our liberation can only be effected by murder, I for one, and I can answer for my friends, would rather endure incarceration for life than that you should——"

"*Tut! tut!*" Manvers broke in, "you speak of you know not what! Fancy, perhaps, I purpose to murder José Ramon and his fellow jailors. Stuff! I repeat you know not of what you speak.

"Has it ever struck you," presently added the unaccountable man in an entirely changed tone, "has it ever struck you, as it did my mother, that the passage in the holy prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation,' would be more fitly rendered by 'Shield us from temptation?'"

"It may be so," I said, "but I am no Biblical scholar—have no talent at all for solving difficulties. You, for example, are to me an utterly inexplicable difficulty!"

"No doubt, no doubt," he laughingly rejoined. "It

will not be till you have read much further on in the story of my life that you will comprehend its true purport. Are you, Mr. Sabine," he sharply added, "a Fatalist?"

"No; certainly not! Why do you ask?"

"Not a Fatalist, and yet as all sane persons must, you recognise the Omniscience, Omnipotence, Foreknowledge, Absolute will of God! Curious! But I am weary of talking, my young friend, and must defer the remaining and more important chapters of my life till to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

MANVERS CONCLUDES HIS STORY.

"Two or three days after the shark affair," resumed Manvers, early on the following day, "the *Neptune*, having completed her cargo, sailed for England. The home-ward like the outward voyage proved uneventful, and the *Neptune*, requiring to be thoroughly overhauled, went into dock at Plymouth.

"I returned to Sidmouth, but soon tired of monotonous shore life. The place still wore, to my jaundiced sight, a funeral aspect. Death found again its sting, the grave its victory !

"Captain Vignolles, another of my father's naval acquaintances invited me to make a voyage with him to Rio de Janeiro, the Brazilian capital, and I accepted the offer. The ship, the *Mermaid*, was going out in ballast, and would bring home a cargo of hides and tallow.

"For this reason—the *Mermaid* going out in ballast—a cabin for first-class passengers had been fitted up. Only one lady, a Mrs. Rainsford, availed herself of the chance, and engaged berths for self and a child-daughter, Evangeline. Most persons naturally preferred making so long a voyage by steamer.

"Mrs. Rainsford was the wife of Major Rainsford, an English officer who had served on Bolivia's staff, and was much younger than her husband. The Spanish yoke having been finally cast off by the revolted South

American States, Major Rainsford, after many wanderings, had finally settled near Coimbra, New Coimbra, in Brazil, a place quite, I should say, five hundred miles distant from Paraguay, and established there an extensive cattle-breeding concern, such as I have heard you, Mr. Sabine, describe that of the Brothers Gotlieb to be.

“Mrs. Rainsford had revisited England, which she left when very young, for the restoration of her daughter’s health, which, it was feared, shewed symptoms of decline. The experiment had, to all appearance, been eminently successful, her beautiful and highly sensitive child, who had not long passed her ninth birthday when I first beheld her, appearing to be in sound if not robust health.

“In saying that Evangeline was a singularly sensitive child, I mean that her’s was a peculiarly imaginative, impressionable temperament—that she was, I might almost say, absurdly as it sounds, *poetically* swayed by all impulses of soul and sense. An incident, that on ordinary persons would have but a passing, transient effect, imprinted itself deeply on her mind, giving to airy nothings enduring form and substance—evoked fantastic phantoms, not the less realistic in effect that they were fantastic phantoms.

“I feel,” continued Manvers, “that I do not correctly explain my meaning, but an incident I shall have presently to relate will supply the deficiency better than many words, and I am not inclined to idly prate by the way—an ever darkening way, at the end of which lies, I fear——

“‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,’ and I pass on. The *Mermaid* encountered terrible weather from almost the first day she was well at sea. The continuous tempest, which had slightly abated at intervals,

redoubled in violence about a fortnight after we left port, and the ship, one black, hideous night, was, by a sudden terrific blast, cast completely on her beam ends.

"The masts finally cut away, under the resolute supervision of Captain Vignolles, the *Mermaid* righted, and the immediate peril had passed. Presently a cry was raised that the ship had sprung a leak, that there were five feet of water in the hold. Panic, terror, at once seized upon the already much demoralised crew ; and on looking about for the Captain, who alone could, we knew, effectually rebuke and control the wild tumult, we ascertained that he was not in the ship; he had been doubtless swept overboard, by the tremendous seas constantly breaking over the ill-fated vessel.

"This was the climax. The men, utterly reckless, broke open the spirit room, drank themselves mad. Some one presently cried out that the ship was sinking ; the frantic crew, without waiting to ascertain the truth, got, somehow, the ship's three boats into the water, tumbled into them —how many fell into the sea in endeavouring to do so, the blackness of the night prevented me from observing —and pulled off into the thick darkness. They were never heard of.

"I, not being mad-drunk, had resolutely refused to leave the ship. All did, however, except myself and Mrs. Rainsford, who, with Evangeline, I need hardly say, was below in the chief cabin. I went down, assured Mrs. Rainsford there was no immediate danger, and advised them both to lie down and endeavour to snatch a blink of sleep. As if, for them, sleep was possible under such circumstances ! Quite possible for me, over whom a strange feeling of apathy had come, arising, no doubt, and in some degree unconsciously, from the belief in Fatal-

ism, which, young as I was, had been with me, since my mother's death, a fixed article of faith. But that it was so decreed, an eternity before her bodily creation, her pure spirit would not have been, by a just and merciful God, snatched from its earthly sphere, at the very time that its illumining, guiding influence was most required by the child whom that just and merciful God had intrusted to her keeping.

" You smile, Sabine, in pity, sad pity of my unreasoning folly as you deem it. Well, the logic of the sentiment may not be unassailable. I speak only of what I felt, feel. I sought my sleeping berth on the night in question, turned in, and slept soundly.

" I rose early, found that the hurricane had spent its fury, and that the raging sea was fast going down. The leak, which could only have been a slight one, had by some means got closed, and there was no immediate danger, consequently, of foundering.

" The masts gone, cut away by the board, the *Mermaid* lay a helpless log on the water. I could not pretend to raise even an apology for a jury-mast ; but I did contrive to lash a pole spar to a part of the bulwark, in an upright position, and to fasten at its top the Union Jack, upside down. That we had been driven out of our course I was sure ; and being able at noon to take an accurate observation, I found, if the unfortunate captain's chronometer could be relied on, that we must be somewhere about a hundred miles to the north-east of the island of Jamaica, West Indies, and in the track, therefore, of vessels trading to and from Port Royal to England. There was hope in that.

" The weather continued calm and bright. Mrs. Rainsford and daughter gradually recovered a trustful,

hoping equanimity, and a conviction grew upon me—though I had my misgivings that the wish was father to the thought—that we were all three *destined* to escape the present peril, when a new source of terror—a fanciful one, reasonably looked at—suddenly revealed itself.

“An enormous shark attached itself, as it were, to the ship, remaining close by us, day and night, at all events but rarely disappearing, and then for a brief space only.

“This far from uncommon occurrence attracted the notice and excited the wildest terror in impressionable Evangeline. The monster appeared to exert a fascinating power over her, such as I supposed is felt by birds and other small animals when exposed to the gaze of a serpent, impelling them to cast themselves into the reptile’s ravenous jaws.

“We could only keep her from looking on the brute, tremblingly praying to it as she gazed, by main force; and one moonlight night, when, fortunately, I was on deck and awake, she crept silently away from her mother’s side, took a piece of boiled beef out of the larder, came gently up the companion-stairs, peered, her height barely enabling her to do so, saw the hideous thing in a manner disporting itself on the surface of the silver sea, and, shuddering convulsively, dropped the piece of beef over the side, her fascinated, dilated gaze remaining fixed upon the shark.

“More than that. With a cry, a plaintive cry of terror or horror, the child actually began endeavouring to climb over the bulwarks with, it seemed, the intention of casting herself into the monster’s jaws.

“I seized and bore her back. She fainted as I carried her to Mrs. Rainsford. The strange occurrence gave me, as you may imagine, a terrible shock. I spoke long with

Mrs. Rainsford that same evening. ‘It is killing my child,’ said the weeping, horrified mother. ‘She cannot sleep, and if she falls off for a few minutes, the horrid creature pursues her in her dreams, and she awakes screaming to it for mercy. Can nothing be done? Are there no means of destroying it?’

“‘Had it been possible for me to kill the shark, I should have done so before this. There is not a single musket in the ship,’ I replied.

“‘I have but one hope; my child is impressed by, partakes of that blessed hope. We are,’ continued Mrs. Rainsford, ‘as I suppose you know, Roman Catholics, and five days ago we commenced a Novena to the Holy Virgin for deliverance from this fearful peril.’

“‘And pray, Madame, what may be a Novena?’

“‘A Novena consists of special prayers,’ said the lady, ‘to the Holy Virgin, continued during nine successive days. On the ninth day deliverance is wrought, or it is certain that the prayer has been rejected. This is not an article of faith, but a pious belief of Catholics. There have been many proofs of the efficacy of the Novena,’ added Mrs. Rainsford, with a deprecatory, tearful, blushing smile, knowing she was addressing a heretic. ‘The great Daniel O’Connell, when sentenced to imprisonment in Kilmainham Jail, had a Novena said for his deliverance, and it was precisely on the ninth day that the House of Lords decided on his liberation!’

“I did not smile, but gravely replied, ‘Continue your Novena, Madame. The prayer, as in O’Connell’s case, may be granted, who shall say? On what day will the Novena cease?’

“‘On Saturday next, four days hence.’

“‘On Saturday next? We have not then very long to

wait. In the meantime, you must keep strict watch over your singularly imaginative child.'

"As Mrs. Rainsford was speaking, the idea of a 'pious fraud,' which the most strait laced of moralists could not blame, had glanced across my brain. It might, I thought, be doubted that the mere killing of the shark, if that were possible, would completely dispel the imaginative terrors which dominated Evangeline, and were fast hurrying her to the grave—unless associated with some supposed supernatural interposition in her behalf, which would, as completely as the 'terror,' dominate, enthral her imagination.

"This Novena supplied that desideratum. I well remembered the Black's exploit in Honduras Bay. I had in my possession his Obeah knife, and I could dive as well as he, and though but a boy, I was quite strong enough for the purpose.

"My own life I scarcely valued at a pin fee, and if I lost it, the situation of Mrs. Rainsford and Evangeline would not be rendered more perilous. They could only then wait, as I with them was waiting, in the hope of being rescued by a passing vessel.

"My mind was made up, and I felt quite a relief in having come to such a resolution. The Novena prayers *should* be answered, or the shark would have the best of the fight, and I did not believe he would——

"Saturday came—a hot, brilliant, yet bracing day, for a gentle breeze was curling the blue waters. I was in high spirits, never felt more thoroughly alive in my life, and observed master Shark, who, happily ignorant of Novenas and Obeah knives, kept placidly near us, with quite a sympathetic interest.

"It wanted but about a quarter of an hour to noon, the hour at which the crowning prayer was to be said by

the trembling votaries below. I stripped, dropped a line over the stern by which to *return* to the ship, should fortune prove propitious ; and watching an opportunity when the sea-devil appeared to be looking in an opposite direction, over the side I went.

“ Quickly as I struck the water and dived, the monster was well nigh too swift for me. Not quite ! I did not lose my presence of mind for a moment ; the Obeah knife did its work, and I was on the *Mermaid's* deck again before I thiuk two minutes had passed. As the Negro had said, the exploit was not very perilous, provided the assailant did not lose his coolness, his presence of mind, nor miss the swiftly passing opportunity of using the knife.

“ A little water cleansed me of the creature's blood. I hurried on my clothes ; and first ascertaining that the shark was dead, and floating on the surface of the water, I hastened softly to the head of the companion-stairs. Bending down, I could hear distinctly the pathetically entreative, ‘*Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis ! Christe Eleison !*’ and it was with some hesitation, as if I were profaning some holy rite, that I called out, ‘ Mrs. Rainsford, Mrs. Rainsford ! Miss Evangeline ! come on deck ! A miracle has been wrought ! The shark is dead ! ’

“ Instantly they upsprang from their knees, hurried on deck, beheld their terrible enemy floating lifeless on its own element, then fell sobbing with passionate emotion on their knees, and as soon as the words would come, burst into exclamatory thanksgiving prayer and praise. I kept in the background, out of sight ; my countenance, I feared, might betray me. It was years afterwards, and then through the indiscretion of a dear friend, Francisco Orfiz, that they knew the truth.

“Evangeline was effectually cured of her terrors, and Heaven only knows how much the votive candles, burned in honour of the Holy Virgin on the anniversary of that day, cost Major Rainsford. It was always a day of high festival at Coimbra, and when, through Francisco’s tattling, the family became acquainted with the real facts, it nothing abated their devotional gratitude to the Mother of Mercy. I had been simply the earthly instrument or agent of the Holy Virgin, who had inspired me, in answer to their prayers, to brave the shark combat, and endowed me with the power to achieve success. Possibly: I had no objection to that view of the case. Not the slightest.

“The next day but one we were rescued from imminent peril of drowning—the *Mermaid* showing unmistakeable symptoms of speedily going down—by the Jamaica mail packet, by which we were safely conveyed to Port-Royal.

“We remained at Kingston a few days only, a ship, leaving Jamaica for Rio, being nearly ready for sea when we landed. The voyage to the Brazilian capital was quick, without accident; and, swiftly as horses could carry us, we speeded on, and safely reached Coimbra.

“I received a cordial welcome from Major Rainsford, and soon became extremely useful to him in managing his books. I was otherwise of service; being a fearless rider, and quickly acquiring great skill with the lasso in capturing the Mustangs—wild horses—which his business was to tame, and dispose of in the Brazilian cities.

“As to myself, I was for a long time—years—careless whether I left or remained in Coimbra: that is, I fancied so, until an advantageous offer was made me by the father of my young friend and companion, Francisco Orfiz, which would require me to reside at Rio. I then felt—and the feeling was, oddly as it seems, a revelation

of myself—for I had not realised, in my secret consciousness, the potency of the tie which linked my future with that of Evangeline—how my being was bound up inextricably with hers.

“I am not going to bore you by rhapsodising about boyish love, beauty, and beauty’s chain, and the rest. You have seen Evangeline’s portrait; and I will merely say it is far from doing justice to the rare loveliness, the fascinating—— Pooh! I am falling into the strain I have just promised to avoid.

“The time passed joyously away. I had attained to the mature age of eighteen, Evangeline was fourteen—a marriageable age in those climes—when an occurrence took place, which, in its results, rudely dissipated the fairy visions in which I had been dreamily nursing myself.

“There was an eccentric individual in Coimbra who had the strange, detestable mania for importing the wild venomous animals of other countries, as if Brazil had not enough of its own. He prided himself upon his powers of taming them. Once he procured a *grizzly*—the formidable bear of North America. That brute soon escaped, and was not again heard of. His next importation was a huge brindled beast, the tiger of Mexico, I believe, and popularly known as the man-eater, from its preference, I suppose, for the human variety of flesh.

“He proved the genuineness of his breed at all events; for not very long after he came into Colza’s possession, and when that idiotic zoologist was boasting of the rapid progress he was making in taming the brute, the man-eater suddenly, and before a number of horror-stricken spectators, seized upon, crunched up his tamer, darted through the open door of his cage or den, and bolted for the more congenial forests.

"Three or four weeks subsequent to this shocking occurrence, Evangeline and I had strayed to a distance of perhaps an English mile from the town-village. Evangeline was something of a botanist, and busied herself in gathering some fine specimens of wild flowers ; whilst I dreamily reclined—watching, contemplating her at three or four hundred yards' distance. I was entirely unarmed —had not even a hunting knife, but was not without my lasso, a peculiarly strong one, especially prepared for me.

"Suddenly lifting her eyes, Evangeline beheld the accursed foreign tiger, the man-eater, creeping softly towards her through the tall, rank surrounding vegetation. With surprising presence of mind, she at once swiftly made for a locust-tree at no great distance. Possibly the grass, through which he was stealthily approaching, concealed her flight for a few moments from the tiger.

"Be that as it may, Evangeline had just gained the locust-tree, when he, with a terrific roar, was about to bound after her. At the same flash of time he sighted me ; I had just risen to my feet, horribly scared, as you will easily believe, for both Evangeline and myself.

"The tiger paused in his spring, intently eyeing me. The lasso I held in my hand probably startled him, the lasso having been one of the modes by which Colza used to catch and master his half-trained brutes, if they appeared mischievously inclined.

"From whatever cause it arose, the tiger's hesitancy gave me time to pull myself together, and away I darted for the locust-tree, and barely in time.

"Was I in time? It appeared not. The infuriated beast leapt at the tree, and though his first effort fell short, it was plain he would succeed in reaching us. It was a

moment during which one lives whole months of fearful life. Evangeline, her momentary energy gone, could scarcely prevent herself, by holding to me, from falling on the ground.

“In utter desperation I threw the lasso, and with marvellous, but surely chance success, it caught the brute round the neck. Instantly taking two or three turns with it round a branch of the tree, close to the outsprouting of the limb from the trunk, I dropped, with Evangeline clinging to me, on the ground, the rapidity of our descent checked by the lasso, the end of which I still grasped.

“Only to witness the rage of the infuriated beast was terrifying. It roared, tugged at the lasso, vainly tugged, and finding it to be so, sprang after it, so to speak, with a furious leap, and gained the tree at the moment I and Evangeline dropped from it.

“The man-eater would not be denied his prey, and leapt after us. Heaven! Shall I ever forget the terror of that fateful moment or the petrifying amazement of the rest! The length of the lasso did not quite permit the beast to reach the ground. The plaited thongs held, and the tiger was suspended by the neck in the air, its tail barely touching the ground. The roaring of the maddened animal, its wild beating of the air, with its terrible paws, paralyzed me for a few seconds. Had I my hunting-knife, the affair might have been quickly finished.

“Presently regaining partial self-possession, I fastened the end of the stout lasso round a lower locust branch, and taking the almost insensible Evangeline in my arms, sped off at my best pace towards the village.

“Talk of miracles! This escape was surely one, my

agency in the matter being altogether mechanical, chance governed !

“The news spread like wildfire, and very quickly a hundred of us, musketed and knived, were hurrying to the scene of the adventure. We found the huge beast quite dead—the first instance, I believe, on record of successful tiger-hanging.

“A few days after this much-belauded wonderful exploit of mine, as people would have it to be, there was a festive gathering at Major Rainsford’s.

“Amongst the guests were, as a matter of course, my friend and intimate Francisco and his father. Francisco would remain with us several days, and sleep in a chamber adjoining mine.

“The merry-making had passed off merrily, and I was reclining on the grass, ‘in a shady bower,’ as a Devonshire song I remember has it, chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies—the former flavour decidedly predominating; for how gracious had not been Evangeline, how almost caressive in her manner, since the tiger adventure. Certain doubts and fears that had given me an occasional heart-quake had fled—forever. A blissful, entrancing future was assured !

“Wrapped in roseate dreams, I was only lazily conscious for some minutes that two persons had entered the immediately adjoining ‘bower,’ and were engaged in earnest conversation.

“Presently, however, my own name, Evangeline’s, Francisco’s, struck my ear, and I listened intently—heard, lying there, my sentence of moral death pronounced.

“‘I am surprised,’ said Señor Boildieu, a Creole Frenchman whom I well knew and respected, ‘I am

surprised, Major Rainsford, at what you tell me. Everybody believes the marriage of that *brave des braves*, the young Manvers'—I am merely repeating, Mr. Sabine, Boildieu's words—‘with your daughter, whose life we know he has twice saved, was a settled thing.’

“‘Everybody is mistaken then,’ said the Major ; ‘but I must say, that I respect Charles Manvers personally, and am sorry they are mistaken. But what can I do ? Evangeline and Francisco are deeply attached to each other, have, with both mothers’ consent, been affianced for some months past.’

“I heard no more ! The ‘bower,’ the earth, the sky whirled around me, and I remembered nothing else till I found myself in bed. I had been discovered in the arbour in a state of ‘coma,’ let us say, which was attributed, though that must have greatly surprised them, knowing as they did my abstemious habits, to my having taken too much wine !

“I was alone. The light of moon and stars was streaming into the chamber, and gradually consciousness, with its hell of memory, returned.

“Deceived, betrayed, mocked at by her whom I adored, by the friend whom I had so loved and trusted—it was thus I mentally raved—what thenceforth was life to me but a cheerless blank, an anathema echoing through brain and heart till they ceased to throb or feel !

“The tempest of my soul surging wildly on, drove my fierce thoughts, in fiercest eddies, to schemes of vengeance, and, as the demon passion gathered force, distinctness, the case containing the Obeah knife, which I had carefully kept possession of, caught my eye. A slight circumstance in itself, but, in my insane mood, suggestive of horrible conclusions.

"The Obeah man's reported words, 'the knife, if you part with it, will be an instrument of murder in the hands of its possessor,' glared at me for the first time in their terrible significance, as I thought of Francisco—the betrayer, the false, traitorous friend—sleeping, as I knew, in the exulting security of success, within a few yards of me.

"The words of the Obeah priest were prophetic. I felt they were. I would fulfil my destiny—and I attempted to leap out of bed.

"Ha! What is this impalpable force which restrains, holds me back?

"You will laugh at what I am now about to say, Mr. Sabine," Manvers went on, excitedly; "deem it the ravings of a fevered brain; but as I live and breathe, the form of my sainted mother—ethereal, radiant, dimming by contrast the splendour of the cloudless night of a tropical firmament, moonlit and studded with golden stars—stood visibly before me, and the voice, which I so well remembered, but sublimised now to seraph-sweetness, said, 'I am permitted to appear and shield thee, my son, from satanic influence. Tempt not the Lord; but flee from *temptation*, from this house, that it may be well with thee.' So speaking, the angelic figure stooped over me, and I felt a kiss of love, of blessing, a blessed kiss, peace-breathing, imprinted on my forehead.

"The next moment the angelic radiance had vanished, and I fell into profoundest slumber! What say you, my young friend? Was the vision real?"

"Yes, real, as a solemn warning vouchsafed to you. Is it not written that angels sometimes visit us unawares? May they not do so in dreams?"

"You admit it was a warning. I felt it to be so,

and upon awaking, at once determined upon the course to pursue. I had sufficient money; and taking a horse, my own horse, from the stables, I departed forthwith—my only leave-taking a few lines addressed to Major Rainsford, curtly informing him that he would see me no more.

“ Week after week, month after month, I wandered here and there, traversed vast tracts of country, a prey to passion, then passions of grief, of rage, jealousy, well nigh despair, till I found myself in this city. I put up at a tavern frequented by officers of high grade in the President’s (Lopez the First’s) service. I had given way, in my distraction, to intemperate habits; and a fierce quarrel soon ensued between me and an officer standing high in the President’s favour. We fought, and he was severely, it was thought for a time mortally, wounded. I had also indulged, people have told me, in fierce abuse of the President himself. This, in Paraguay, is an unpardonable sin, and I was forthwith shut up here for life.

“ After a while, when reason resumed her sway, I commissioned the Advocate Huerta, *your* Huerta, to make inquiries for me at Coimbra. He did so, and ascertained that Evangeline and Francisco were married within a little month of my disappearance.

“ I was again unmanned, prostrate for a time, but not a long time. I was here secure, at all events, from falling into the temptation my sainted mother had been permitted to warn me against, and I gradually resigned myself to the inevitable, to the predestinate fate assigned to me during the Eternity which has fled past. Does not,” added the erratic-minded man, with sharp saddening, “ does not your uncomprehending human soul shudder bewilderedly at the thought of an *Eternity gone past?*”

"The insolvable," I said, "is not a fitting theme for a finite intellect to dwell upon. You have concluded the story of your life?"

"Yes, so far as it has gone. The yet unwritten pages will, I hope and believe, be brief, uneventful, commonplace! You now, Mr. Sabine, comprehend," he added, with, as it were, hurried, impassionate fierceness; "you now comprehend why, though the effort would be facile of accomplishment to me, and whilst fervently desirous of the release of yourself and friends from this death-in-life imprisonment, I refuse to effect your liberation!"

"Indeed, I do not, Mr. Manvers. Amongst the many strange statements you have made, that appears to me the strangest, the most inexplicable!"

"What!" he thundered. "Did I not say that I could not set you at liberty without freeing myself? And can you ask me to hold as nought, to defy the command of the Angelic Visitant to flee from temptation, to shun the house where dwell the betrayers of my life and hopes? Were I free," he added, in tones of solemn earnestness and deepest conviction, "the satanic influence from which I was then rescued would resume its power, and I should, spite of myself, of my better self, hurry to Coimbra, and slay them both in the marriage-bed—the Obeah prophet's words would be fulfilled! Leave me now, Mr. Sabine," he added, his voice again sinking to sadness. "Leave me now; Mr. Sabine. I am weary. Let us strive to possess our souls in patience till the, to us, dawn of that eternity to come, which may, we will humbly trust, make these odds all even."

I withdrew in a bewildered, chaotic state of mind, unable to decide how much of sheer madness, how

much of calm sense, of verity, was mixed up in the strange story I had heard.

De Veron and Penard, to whom I related its substance, were equally puzzled, but we did not very earnestly debate the subject. A deep despondency was fast settling upon us : the iron barrier shutting us out from the world. All other subjects had comparatively lost their interest for us.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CATASTROPHE OF A WAYWARD LIFE.

ADVOCATE HUERTA and his double, Antonio Gompertz, frequently visited us, always professing the warmest concern for our welfare. Huerta was working silently for our release, burrowing underneath, like the blind mole, a passage for our escape.

We understood that very well. I was not a completely shelled peascod. There was possibly attainable plunder left. I did not know why, but he seemed to attribute my invincible distrust, which he could not but perceive, to the counsel of ‘my countryman, Crazy Charles,’ of whom he always spoke in terms of apparent contempt, and very real anger, dislike.

One agreeable change in our condition we certainly owed to the influence of Huerta. We were removed from the cell to a comparatively comfortable room, in which there were three curtained bed-recesses, so that we could sleep apart. The furniture, too, though rough was sufficient.

Manvers almost took up his abode with us, and worked in our room, whilst painting the promised portrait of Juanita, José Ramon’s child, seated on her father’s knee.

Juanita, fresh from the health-giving breezes of the hill country, was a charming child, a really pretty, a most engaging brunette. How intensely the father doted on her! I frequently observed him when watching her—

tears of rapturous affection trickling down his rough, bronzed cheeks. The child ardently returned his affection, and she was also much attached to 'Charles.'

One day after a rather protracted sitting, and Ramon with the child being gone, Manvers, complaining of fatigue, asked leave to lie down in one of the curtained bed-recesses I have spoken of.

He had scarcely enclosed himself when the door opened, and Advocate Huerta appeared. I thought he must have seen Manvers; but, from his subsequent conversation, it appeared he was ignorant of his presence. There was a sharp, malicious twinkle in Huerta's keen, dark eyes which I did not comprehend, nor indeed care to do so.

Huerta spoke at first upon indifferent subjects—the progress of the war with Brazil, which, of course, was going on favourably for the President, *et cetera*.

Suddenly changing his subject, he said, "It hurt him much to find I was not disposed to treat him with the confidence which he felt, knew he deserved. But I cannot help," he added, "attributing it to the calumnies of your crazy countryman, Manvers; who, I know, hates me bitterly, but assuredly without cause."

"Did I," continued Huerta, "reciprocate that dislike, I could easily gratify my spleen; drive Manvers—escape for him from this prison being, he well knows, impossible—to utter distraction, madness!"

"If that be so," said I, hastily, "pray do not make me the confidant of your maddening secret."

"Oh, you won't speak of it to him! Soon after Manvers was first brought here," continued Huerta rapidly, "he commissioned me to make certain inquiries for him at Coimbra, a small town between two and three hundred leagues distant from Paraguay.

"I despatched a special messenger to Coimbra, but either he was himself misinformed, or he wilfully misled me. He reported that a certain Evangeline had married one Francisco Orfiz soon after the unaccountable disappearance of Manvers.

"This I found many months afterwards was the reverse of truth. There had been a huge misapprehension. The young lady really loved Manvers, and had since persistently refused the addresses of Orfiz, and, as I happen to know, is to this day—or, at least, she was a few months ago—pining for the return of her absent lover, whom she still, spite of all reasonings, obstinately asserts will reappear to claim her.

"Fancy," added Huerta, with, it seemed to me, exultant ferocity, "what maddening torture this knowledge would inflict upon Manvers, who I have no doubt, has given you his version of the love-story—he, as I have said, well knowing that his escape from this place is utterly impossible, that inexorable fate—he is himself, as you I daresay know, a fatalist—that inexorable fate has doomed him to die here, his Evangeline to mourn for him on through hated existence, till the grave also shuts up her life, ends her sorrows. I have, in mercy," concluded Huerta, "kept this carefully concealed from Manvers, and shall continue to do so, and you will, I am sure, be silent upon the subject. But my time is expired; I must be gone. Adieu for the present."

This rapid revelation of Huerta's bewildered, dumbfounded not only me, but M. de Veron and Penard. What effect would it have on the listener concealed in the curtained recess?

Full ten minutes elapsed before that anxious query was solved. There was a deep, dead silence in the

room, neither of us addressing each other, except with our eyes, and the occupant of the recess did not speak or stir.

At last Manvers sprang out of bed, and stood erect before us, deadly pale, but of calm, collected, determined aspect, and his eyes were ablaze with flame—whether fire from heaven or the other place, it was impossible to say.

“Mr. Sabine—you Messieurs,” he presently said, in a vibrating but firm voice, “will hold yourself in readiness to leave this prison at about this time to-morrow. I shall myself warn your friends, every one of whom will leave with us. You will, of course, be silent upon the subject. Do not fear that I am either deceiving myself or you. You will as certainly be beyond the power or reach of President Lopez before sunset to-morrow as that you are now here.

“The gold I have heard you speak of, Mr. Sabine,” added Manvers, “is, I conclude, easily come-at-able?”

“I have no doubt of that,” I said, “not the slightest.”

“That is well. Good-bye for the present. I shall probably not see you again till to-morrow.”

The door closed after him, and for some minutes we—De Veron, Penard, and myself—could only stare at each other in silent astonishment.

“Ha! bah!” at last exclaimed M. de Veron, “it is all nothing. He thinks to bribe Don José Ramon with your gold to connive at our escape. Ramon, the President’s foster-brother, and known to enjoy his entire confidence, is no doubt absolute here, and could liberate us easily if he chose to do so. No doubt of that. And so could a French army if it were at the gates. And one mode of deliverance is just as likely as the other.”

“Ramon,” said Penard, bitterly, “would simply appro-

priate your gold as Huerta did, then not only laugh at the English madman, but at you, M. Sabine, at us, for having been duped so egregiously."

I thought as they did. And yet—— We all of us passed—I can positively answer for myself—a restless, anxious night.

Manvers made his appearance early, and breakfasted with us. He was perfectly calm, collected, and there was in his eyes a brilliant, a true-light—it so photographed itself on my mind—which I had never before observed.

"I warned your friends, the Doctor inclusive," he remarked, "yesterday evening. Like you," he added, "they fear I am indulging in a silly craze—dreaming dreams—endeavouring to lull them in a fools' paradise."

"You purpose," said M. de Veron, bluntly, "you purpose to bribe the Governor of the jail with M. Sabine's gold?"

"A thousand times the amount of money which, as I understand, is at M. Sabine's disposition, would not bribe José Ramon to betray his trust, Still, it is fortunate the gold is at hand. Let us speak no more on the subject," added Manvers. "The time for action is not far distant. I shall return presently."

What *could* be the scheme afoot for our liberation? Impossible to guess, surmise! The cool, confident bearing of Manvers impressed, spite of himself, even incredulous M. de Veron.

Two hours subsequently the child Juanita was taking her last sitting, her father looking on delightedly.

"Come closer to me, Juanita, darling!" said Manvers; "here, sit on my knee for a few moments."

The artist clasped the child closely to his side, at the same time drawing from beneath his vest a small poniard.

"Don José," exclaimed Manvers, with fierce yet calm

sternness, “I, these three gentlemen, the Marstons, and their friends, must be forthwith set free, or I slay your child, here myself!”

Thunder fell upon us with those appalling words. José Ramon, with a wild cry of terror, sprang forward to snatch his child from Manvers.

“One step nearer,” shouted Manvers, pressing the point of the dagger close to the bosom of the terrified child, “one step nearer, José Ramon, and in one moment the deed is done which an eternity could not undo! You know me—that I am not a man to threaten in vain!”

The horrified father staggered back, and fell down as if paralyzed upon a seat. He could not speak.

“Listen to me, Ramon,” said Manvers, after a death-like silence of some minutes’ duration. “You are absolute with respect to the prisoners in the State jail. No one, in the absence of the President—not even the Commandant of the city—would dare dispute your orders, whatever they may be. You, I know, dislike your office—chiefly because of Juanita, whom you wish to grow up amidst a refined society, of which she could hardly fail to become a grace and ornament. Again, your position in Paraguay is, you know, at the best uncertain. Lopez may be worsted—nay, probably will be worsted, in his encounter with Brazil. In that case, you and your Juanita will be cast friendless, almost penniless, upon the world, for you have been able to save nothing for her.

“An opportunity,” continued Manvers, “now presents itself of assuring your child’s future and your own! M. Sabine here will, immediately you agree to my terms, hand you over a handsome dowry for Juanita in ready gold.”

“That will I,” exclaimed I, impetuously. “That will

I ; and more, much more, I swear to forward you, if what I possess"—and I named the sum—"is not sufficient."

"It is quite sufficient," said Manvers; "more than sufficient. Well, how say you, Don Ramon?" he added, with unmitigated sternness. "*My* mind is fully made up. Blessing and cursing are placed before you. Choose! Either you consent to free us, or Juanita will to-morrow be in her coffin."

A violent shudder convulsed, seemed to rend, Ramon's whole frame of being.

"All men, all loyal men," he presently murmured, "will hold my name, my memory, in execration. God of Heaven! *Sancta Maria!* How shall I decide? And Lopez, my foster-brother, so trusts, confides in me! I know not what to do, or say! My brain turns!"

"Oh, papa! papa!" Juanita exclaimed in sobbing, tremulous tones; she was a remarkably intelligent child, and seemed to comprehend what was passing with marvellous insight—"Oh, papa, papa! do as dear Charles wishes. We shall be so happy away from this terrible place!"

The child-accents prevailed. After another fierce mental conflict, José Ramon yielded. "Enough," he said. "The choice given me is either to turn traitor or see my child murdered before my eyes. I know the madman would carry out his threat."

"Where is the gold to be found," Ramon added, after a brooding silence of some duration.

"I will give you a hieroglyph," said M. de Veron, "which upon presentation will insure its instant delivery to bearer."

"That is well. In one hour from this," said Ramon, "the vehicles to convey us all home will be in readiness.

You must leave by the secret way," he added. " Do you, M. Sabine, wish to see your friends the Marstons ? You would. I will conduct you to them."

He was stepping before me towards the door, but paused irresolutely. " May I embrace my child, Manvers ? "

" No," was the firm but soft-toned reply. " I cannot bear to deny you ; but Juanita must remain in my arms, and unapproached, till we are safe beyond Paraguayan territory."

Ramon groaned, but led on. I shall not attempt to describe my meeting with Harry, with the Marstons. I could not ! It was a Babel—a tumult of passionate exclamations—of heart-sobbing, violent shaking of hands. Of articulate speech there was but little.

Harry was pale and thin, but the untamable spirit was manifest as ever ! Miss Marston appeared to be very ill and weak ; so did her father, a soldierly-looking man, but less so than she. Lieutenant Marston had not apparently suffered so much ; but as for the Doctor, I had never known so great a change wrought in a man in so short a time. He looked at least ten years older than when I last saw him.

We were quite ready when Don José Ramon returned, ready, cloaked for the journey. He invited us to follow him, which we very readily did—Ellen Marston supported on one side by Harry, on the other by Felice. Manvers, with the child, Juanita, in his arms, partially concealed by his cloak, watchful as a lynx, brought up the rear.

We threaded in profound silence several long, dark passages, all sentinelled at regulated distances by picked men belonging to the President's bodyguard. Not one

of the soldiers dared question the Governor, who stalked gloomily along in front.

The broad light of day—it was not much past noon—when we emerged from the last subterranean passage, almost blinded one for a moment—several of us staggered under the sudden glare. There were two large vehicles—a sort of covered van—each drawn by two horses, awaiting us at the rear of the prison. We were speedily seated, and spinning into the country at a furious speed. None of us seemed inclined to speak: our hearts were too full. I felt for some time as if in a dream—that I was the sport of unreality, of phantasms, the coinage of an overheated brain.

Less than four hours' hard driving brought us to the outposts of a division of the Brazilian army, and all danger was past. Count D'Eu's written order, which had been successfully concealed, was all-potent with the Commander, who received and treated us with the greatest kindness and hospitality.

Ramon, with Juanita, left early the next morning for Rio, accompanying an escort of invalided soldiers bound for that capital. Kirwan went with them. Nothing could have induced the Doctor to remain behind. He proposed to embark for Europe at the very first opportunity.

Miss Marston's health was so much impaired that it was deemed indispensable she should recruit it by a sojourn of some weeks at the Sanatorium amongst the hills, in the vicinity of Coimbra, of which Manvers had spoken. We should consequently be fellow-travellers with Charles Manvers till he reached the dwelling of the Rainsfords.

I was fidgetty about that matter. Was Huerta telling

a truth, or improvising a fable? For I could not help thinking that he had seen Manvers getting into the curtained recess when he related that story of Evangeline's constancy and broken-heartedness.

Huerta no doubt believed, as he said he did, that for Manvers to escape from the Paraguayan State Prison was utterly impossible. Had he, then, knowing the "crazy Englishman" must be listening, with diabolic cunning invented a maddening fiction for the purpose of rendering existence insupportable to the man he so disliked, hated?

I feared so, and Roland shared my opinion. How, he argued, could Major Rainsford and Mrs. Rainsford have been mistaken as to their only daughter's sentiments? "It's all bosh," said Harry, "a lying invention of that sneak, Huerta—a fellow it would do one's heart good to cowhide within an inch or nearer of his reptile life. I'd bet something that Evangeline is Mrs. Orfiz, and the mother of six or seven strapping children!"

As we neared Coimbra, I fancied Manvers began to feel some misgivings. "Would you, Mr. Sabine," he said to me when we were within a short hour's ride of Coimbra, "would you, who know my story, favour me by preceding my arrival at Major Rainsford's? My sudden, too abrupt appearance might—you understand—"

"Clearly. Our party are about, I perceive, to rest and refresh: you had best remain with them whilst I ride forward; I shall not be long absent."

Roland, who was close by, insisted upon accompanying me.

"*There is Major Rainsford on the grass-plot before his house, with the two ladies and a younger gentleman,*" said a civil-spoken passer-by in answer to my question.

The persons pointed out were seated on a rustic seat, a rustic table furnished with wine, fruits, &c., was before them and they appeared to be in a remarkably merry mood.

We drew bridle in order to take—ourselves unseen—a good look at them. Harry had always carried a field-glass, and he took a longish stare at the group. Closing the glass with a snap, “I see how it is,” he growled. “Poor Manvers !”

“How *what* is ?” said I, taking and using the glass in my turn.

“Now then,” said Harry, “how do you read it ?”

“Nay, how do you ? Say on ?”

“Well, there can be no mistake, can there ? as to the Major, nor his wife either ! The interest concentrates in the younger couple. That amazingly stout young lady—for her age—and with such a remarkably, has-once-been, pretty face. Who can *she* be, I wonder ! Surely not the divine Evangeline !”

“A mother, too, by Jove !” continued Roland. “One, two, three, four marriage blossoms, running, toddling to her, climbing her knees—ay, and climbing up into the younger gentleman’s lap, too ! Senor Francisco, for a thousand ! A charming picture of domestic felicity !” added Harry. “But how Manvers——But come, let us go through with it. He won’t, perhaps, take it so much to heart as we imagine.”

Our interview with the Rainsford family was an embarrassing one. We could not, as lawyers say, make “a full disclosure,” but we felt pretty sure the two ladies guessed closely enough at the truth. Madame Orfiz was still pretty, very much so, but so enormously stout ! Now there is no harm in a young woman being stout ; but there is certainly no romance in it.

They all expressed themselves in the kindest terms of Charles Manvers, and the Major especially should be delighted if he would again make their home his home.

"Are those all your children?" asked Roland of Madame Orfiz.

"No; the eldest, Evangeline, is out taking a carriage drive with the nurse. She is a much more delicate child than the others. Ah, here is the carriage!"

The child came timidly into the room, quite startling Harry and me by her exact, her wonderful resemblance to the portrait, the earliest, Manvers had painted of his Evangeline. If the child had sat expressly to him, it could not have been more exactly her counterpart!

"Madame Orfiz," presently said Harry, somewhat hurriedly, "will you have the goodness not to dismiss the carriage. I should much like Mr. Manvers to see your eldest child—this charming Evangeline—before he—before he—presents himself—before he—my friend Sabine here," he added, colouring to the temples, "knows what I mean, though—confound him—he won't speak!"

The lady coloured, too, also perfectly comprehending the clever idea that had suddenly flashed upon Roland. "There can be no possible objection," was her gentle reply; and the charming Evangeline was presently re-seated in the carriage, and we took leave of the amiable family.

"This is how it must be managed, Bob," said Harry. "When we are at about three or four hundred yards' distance from Manvers, you must dismount, Evangeline also. You take her by the hand, and walk slowly towards our stricken friend. He comes to meet you, and will understand it all like a flash of lightning. Then who knows but that the child Evangeline of his heart and

memory, thus wondrously reproduced before his eyes, may not soften the bitter disappointment which awaits him?"

I thought there might be something in the suggestion, and agreed to do as desired.

The truth, as Harry predicted, did burst at sight of the child like a flash of lightning upon poor Manvers! He fainted outright—not surprising that he should, in his prison-weakened state.

He soon revived; and manifested the liveliest, tenderest interest in the child, who, on her part, seemed to understand and reciprocate in an infantine way his gentle loving-kindness. We talked for some time together, and Manvers finally resolved to accompany the child home.

Our party proceeded on some three leagues farther to the Sanatorium, where we found superior accommodation—infinitely superior, indeed, to what is generally met with in the interior of Brazil. The air, or the Lake waters, or both combined, effected a rapid improvement in Miss Marston's health, and little doubt remained that she would speedily be strong enough to resume the journey to Rio de Janeiro. After a short rest there, and the celebration of an interesting ceremony, the bride, with father, brother, husband, would take wing for England—never, if she and Harry knew it, to prowl about again amidst the wildernesses of South America.

Captain Marston had very properly inquired of me concerning my friend, and, he understood, distant cousin, Mr. Roland's means of maintaining a wife in a suitable position.

"I myself," he said, "am comparatively a poor man—the question is therefore a vital one."

"I set the veteran's mind at rest on that point. Mr.

Roland, I told him, was the only nephew of an aged and rich bachelor-uncle, whose heir he would undoubtedly be. That uncle allowed him five hundred a-year, was very desirous he should marry during his lifetime, and had promised a covenant to secure him an income of two thousand a-year on the day of marriage. There is not the slightest doubt," I added, "that Mr. Archibald Roland, who is extremely attached to his nephew—who, indeed, can help liking him?—will be better, much better, even than his word."

Quite satisfactory!

I may here mention that I proved to be altogether wrong with respect to Louise de Veron and Lieutenant Marston. Neither was disposed to marry out of their respective nations.

Harry and I, some ten or twelve days after our arrival at the Imperial Lake Hotel, rode over to Coimbra.

We found Charles Manvers regularly domiciled with the Rainsfords. He did not, however, mingle with the family, had seen Madame Orfiz herself but once for a few minutes only, and was intensely absorbed in the child Evangeline, upon whom consumption, rapid consumption it was feared, had set its fatal seal. He seldom, the Major told us, left the child, except for a few minutes, either by night or day.

We visited the sick room, and our first glance at the dear child convinced us that her time in this world would be brief indeed.

Charles Manvers was seated by the side of her cot, his sad eyes fixed intently upon the angel-face. He saw, but scarcely noticed, and did not speak to us. His mind, we saw, was gone—his feeble life bound up in that of the child, whom he, the nurse told us, in some way identified,

as she judged, by some incoherent sentences he had let fall, with an Evangeline he had known when a boy.

We did not again see Charles Manvers in life or death. The child died, fell peacefully asleep smiling her last earthly smile—a ray of parting sunlight—on the kind, yearning face bent over her in tenderest sympathy and love. He could not be persuaded to leave the corpse, would sit up with it. The next morning the nurse was horrified at discovering the cot was empty, the child-corpse carried off! The search after it did not last long. Charles Manvers, with the child in its grave clothes clasped in his arms, was found dead in the orange “bower,” as he had termed it, where he once heard that not he but another possessed the affections of his adored Evangeline!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ROVER RETURNS.

AT Rio de Janeiro once more, securely housed with Mr. and Madame Elsworthy ! The meeting between that lady and Ellen Marston, who had quite recovered her health and spirits, was, I may say, enthusiastically cordial. Dr. Kirwan, we found, had embarked for England several weeks previously ; Don José Ramon and his Juanita had taken ship for Vera Crnuz, Mexico.

There was no letter for me, neither of recal nor of acquiescence in a protracted stay. Even Emily had not written. What might that silence mean ? My mind misgave me. Had I escaped from what seemed mortal peril abroad, amongst strangers, to be wrecked in port ?

No letter from Emily ! How my thoughts darkened that way ! Harry would have it that no news was in a certain sense good news. *Portrait charmant* had, he was sure, written, but her letters had miscarried—a frequent occurrence, he said. It was notorious that there was much bungling mismanagement in the South American postal-service. Besides, shouldn't I soon see *Portrait charmant* herself, and hear all about that and a thousand things besides, from the lips of that divinity herself ? To be sure !

Harry and Ellen Marston were married at the British Embassy. A splendid wedding ? Madame Elsworthy took care of that. There was not the slightest occasion for

Captain Marston's anxiety for his daughter's future position. The wedding-jewels presented to her by Madame Elsworthy were estimated at, I am afraid to say what sum ; and the fountain whence flowed that wealth, was, I felt sure, not exhausted nor likely to dry up.

I was, of course, ‘best man’ at the wedding—a sorry ‘best man !’ My mind was full of scorpion doubts and fears ; and it scarcely lightens one’s own grief-burthen to look at happiness through other men’s eyes.

“A letter for you, an English, a Hampshire letter, you despondent, lachrymose sinner !” exclaimed Harry, bursting into the chamber before I was up. “Not a black-edged, death letter. It’s directed in a female hand,” added Harry, doubtfully, “but I don’t know whose.”

Neither did I ; but hastily tearing the letter open, I found it was from Mrs. Alford. This was its substance :—

“Dear Emily, who had been suddenly sent for by my father, was too ill, too agitated to write. I had not been heard of for so long, that she, my father, every one, believed that both Mr. Roland and myself had perished in the savage wilds of America.

“The Squire, it had been feared, was sinking fast. He had been long ill, and on that very day Mrs. Alford was writing, a startling discovery had been made. Mrs. Alford, as yet, hardly comprehended the affair ; but she wrote at once, at dear Emily’s request, a few lines to save the post.

“Mr. Conway and his daughter Alice, one or both of them, had intercepted my last letter to my father, and a will, if she, Mrs. Alford, understood the matter rightly. Miss Conway’s maid had secreted the letter, with the intention, no doubt, of making profitable use of it some

day or other. A violent quarrel had occurred between the mistress and maid ; and the latter, out of revenge, had placed the letter in Mr. Sabine, my father's, hands. His rage at the discovery was unbounded. Emily was immediately sent for, and a special messenger despatched to his London lawyer to hasten down, in order to draw up another will in favour of Emily, as the one existing devised everything, should authentic tidings of his son's death be received, to Miss Conway. Emily herself, whom my father would scarcely let out of his sight, would write by the next post. It was almost believed, Mrs. Alford added, that hopeful tidings of me having been received, the Squire might rally from the very serious attack of illness, from which he had been so long suffering."

This letter, meagre in some respects, wonderfully uplifted me from the depths of despondency into which I had fallen. My father, I felt sure—*would* feel sure—*had* recovered, and all dark doubts concerning Emily had vanished. Again she gleamed in lurid, radiant loveliness and grace on the brightening horizon of my yet youthful life.

We sailed in the mail steamer, the next day. A joyous party ; De Veron, Penard, and Louise the only soberly-cheerful of us all. They proposed to settle in London till the Man of the 2nd of December was hurled from power, if that should ever be. Faithful Felice was retained in Mrs. Harry Roland's service.

We arrived in London after a swift, pleasant passage, and I immediately called upon our family lawyers at 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields. The two principals were not at the office ; but my father, the managing clerk informed

me, was dead—had died somewhat suddenly, he understood. The property, he added, had been *conditionally* devised to a young lady—he did not remember her name—who, upon proof of my death, would absolutely inherit the whole. The young lady, he believed, was then staying in the New Forest, with a relative.

The young lady staying with a relative in the New Forrest was no question Emily. I should find solace, consolation for my father's death in the converse and society of her who had doubtless received his last breath—been sanctified to me by his last blessing; and I took the train for Southampton early the next morning.

At Southampton I hired a closed carriage, and alighting just before I reached Lyndhurst, walked on first towards Ailsa Lodge. Forest House lay at some distance beyond it.

Great was my astonishment, my indignation, my disgust, on nearing the Lodge, to hear the sound of a piano-forte. The air, too, being playcd, was a joyous one—a great favourite, I remembered, of Emily's. I was greatly pained.

I hurried to the principal entrance, and knocked loudly. The door was opened by a strange servant, past whom I pushed, and walked direct to the music-room, which I brusquely entered. Emily was seated, her back towards me, at the piano, her waist half-circled by a fellow in a naval uniform, who, hearing my step, turned sharply round.

By Jove! the handsome Lieutenant whom I had once seen at Major Lambton's endeavouring to flirt with Emily!

“Who the devil are you, sir?” he fiercely exclaimed.

“And who the devil are you?” I quite as fiercely retorted. “But I believe I know. As for the young lady——”

The young lady started up with a scream, confronted

me, and—Heaven be thanked for all its mercies, this crowning one especially—was *not* Emily!—how could I for a moment have imagined such a thing—she was Alice Conway!

The London lawyer, hastily summoned by the Squire to prepare a fresh will, had arrived too late. Alice Conway was consequently left presumptive heiress of both the whole real and personal estate. My return was indeed a terrible crushing blow! I almost pitied the previously exultant *intrigante*.

I retired to another room, where I was immediately rushed upon by my old servant, Williams, whom some one had told of my arrival, and very extraordinary capers, for so usually sedate a person, did he cut.

From him I learned, as soon as he had somewhat calmed down, many things. How Miss Sinclair, as he called her, and her aunt, Mrs. Alford, had been literally turned out of doors almost before the breath was out of the Squire's body, by Mr. Conway, who was at the present time, Williams understood, doing the extensive in the way of preparations at the house in Grosvenor Square. He and 'the heiress' had, moreover, determined—my death being confidently taken for granted—upon selling Ailsa Lodge, "so insignificant a country box being quite unfit," chuckled Williams, "for even the temporary residence of such exalted highnesses."

"Do you know where Miss Sinclair is now?" I asked.

"At Mrs. Alford's, no doubt, if she has not left for London, where, I yesterday heard 'the heiress' say with malicious glee, she has accepted a situation as governess in a retired merchant's family. Shall I, sir, order the carriage?"

"No, I shall walk. I sleep here to-night," I added.

It was a lovely summer morning, all nature seemed to be turning summersaults of irrepressible ecstasy. Overhead, amongst the branches, the squirrel leapt from bough to bough, and the merry birds twittered ; whilst, lost to sight in the azure zenith but clearly audible, the lark poured out his exquisite hymn of praise.

How well I remembered walking over this very ground one evening long ago with *Portrait Charmant* after the momentous, as it proved to me to be, dinner party at Major Lambton's !

There is the very stile by which I poured out my love rhapsody to the divine ears.

And yonder, through the avenue of chesnuts, I see the old Elizabethan home of Mrs. Alford.

Scarcely could there be a more lovely situation than that occupied by Forest House, surrounded by stately old trees, under which the deer reclined on the soft green turf, trending down to the lake's edge.

Unable longer to restrain my impatience, I break into a run ; for who is that graceful girlish figure standing in the foreground caressing the fawns ?

“ Emily !—beloved, adored ! ”

“ Robert ! you Rover, can it, *can* it indeed be you ? ”

Less pleasant incidents are likely to befall a man, in this vale of tears, if his life should be a very prolonged one, than the fainting in his arms, for joy at seeing him, of a charming, youthful widow, especially if she be his long estranged *fiancée* ! At least I think so.

The story is told ; and as the carriage is waiting to convey me and my wife to the opera, I cannot even spare time to describe the wedding which took place about six months after my return. Harry was, of course, best man ; and how divinely beautiful looked Emily !

"Gracious goodness, Mr. Sabine ! how *can* a man who was married full five years ago run on in that extravagant way ? It was well enough in a boy, but now——"

"Five years ago, do you say, *ma chere* ? Surely you are mistaken ! If not, time has flown indeed. It seems scarcely more than a month ago since—a golden cloudless month—a month of flowers, of sunshine——"

"*Tut !* Will you be always a boy ? Mistaken indeed ! Why, our eldest girl has just passed her fourth birthday. Little Robert is getting on towards——"

"Pshaw ! Why begin counting the olive-branches so soon ! Wait a while. Harry—but he's an unconscionable fellow—says that he shan't be content with much less than twenty, whilst I shall think my quiver pretty well filled with—say ten, or——"

"Mr. Robert Sabine !!"

"O dear me ! How prim we are !"

"Well, *au revoir* ! Her absolute ladyship won't, as you know, remain for the ballet, though it is the *Pas des Deesses* this evening. So we shan't be late."

THE END.

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